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# DRINKING OUR STORIES:FOOD SOVEREIGNTY IN ECUADOR AND AMAZONIAN RUNA RELATIONS WITH MANIOC AND GUAYUSA

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**DRINKING OUR STORIES:  
FOOD SOVEREIGNTY IN ECUADOR AND  
AMAZONIAN RUNA RELATIONS WITH  
MANIOC AND GUAYUSA**

**by**

**JACQUELINE M KRAMER**

**B. A. ENGLISH AND WRITING**

**THESIS**

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

**Master of Arts  
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## **DEDICATION**

For my grandpa Ben, a farmer and scientist, whose love for plants and the people who grow them breathes in me.

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**B.A., English and Writing, Southern Oregon University, 2012**

**ABSTRACT**

Food sovereignty and the role of the state, international organizations, and social movements in its defense have been deeply researched. However, the role of small-scale farmers who continue traditional agricultural methods reflecting tenets of the food sovereignty movement, has been neglected in its relation to food sovereignty. This work aims to connect the plant-based ecological relationships with small-scale farmers using food sovereignty as an analytical discourse. Specifically, this thesis explores the relationship between Ecuadorian Amazonian Quichua people and two staple crops: manioc and guayusa. Through a gendered and epistemological analysis of food sovereignty, it argues that under the politics of Ecuador's state-sponsored right to food sovereignty, small-scale and everyday farmers unofficially promoting tenets of the food sovereignty movement challenge state-wide definition of food sovereignty. These localized food practices provide important lessons on how policy can be made to support food sovereignty at the scale of the community. By highlighting the contributions of Amazonian Quichua food practices, I challenge the co-optation of food sovereignty discourse currently promoted by the country of Ecuador.

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## Introduction



Figure 1: Political map of Ecuador's Amazonian provinces. Source: <http://www.cpc.unc.edu/projects/ecuador/overviews>

Sitting in a small wooden chair while swatting the bugs from my already bitten legs, I listened intently to the words of an elder Quichua woman from the Pastaza Province of eastern Ecuador. With only my beginning Quichua language skills, my eyes remained glued as I tried to decipher her words. After being posed with the question of what *sumak kawsay* was to her, a concept derived from an Indigenous Andean ideology



meaning “the good life”, and now the political slogan of the current Ecuadorian administration of President Rafael Correa, she spoke of what she deemed most important in her life. While I failed to understand the complexity of her response, I could deduce that she spent a long period of time talking about food. The two other speakers, also Quichua elders of the Ecuadorian Amazon, nodded their heads in agreement, and when it came time for them to talk, they also spoke about food, and namely, the ability to produce their own, without chemicals. *Mana quimicota charinchu*, or, *mana quimicota tiyanchu*<sup>1</sup> they all echoed, meaning, it doesn’t have, or there aren’t, chemicals.

I had come to the Amazon with the intention of learning more about the effects of how the Indigenous ideology of *sumak kawsay*, also frequently referred to as *el buen vivir* in Spanish, functioned in the Ecuadorian state after its incorporation into the Constitution of Ecuador in 2008. It has been argued that *buen vivir* is used as a framework for “post-neoliberal” alternative development models that prioritize social well-being and participation (Radcliffe, 2012), is in line with sustainable development discourse (Vanhulst & Beling, 2014), and “makes possible the subordination of economic objectives to ecological criteria, human dignity, and social justice” (Escobar, 2015, p. 455). One such manifestation of *buen vivir* has been the granting of constitutional rights to nature. However, the government has taken a “pragmatic” approach to the rights of nature, relying on economic development through extractive industries to support welfare programs (Lalander, 2014). The government’s use of *buen vivir* has also been criticized as not fully developed (Vanhulst & Beling, 2014), and existing within an essentially

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<sup>1</sup> I use the Pastaza Quichua dialect direct object marker here because the main speaker is from Pastaza. However, the other two speakers are from Napo therefore would say *quimicora*.

colonial state that prioritizes certain rights over other to “reproduce postcolonial hierarchies of poverty, difference and exclusion” (Radcliffe, 2012, p. 248).

I quickly realized that the tensions inherent in contemporary state programs in the name of *sumak kawsay* would take extensive fieldwork to uncover. However, listening to the elders talk about what, to them *sumak kawsay*, the good life, actually was, I realized how central food was to their idea of “the good life.” Within the framework of *sumak kawsay*, the Constitution of Ecuador also includes the right to food sovereignty as a state goal. However, similar to the tensions between *sumak kawsay* and development, food sovereignty exists within similar ideological and scalar tensions. How does the state define food sovereignty? As the self-declared guarantor of food sovereignty, is the state responsible for food sovereignty at the level of the nation, or that of individual communities? This is of particular importance for communities living in the resource-rich Amazon, where conflicts over land and extraction remain hotly contested issues. My thesis will explore the negotiations and contradictions between the state’s definition of food sovereignty, how social movements are defining food sovereignty, and the actual food practices of Indigenous rural producers in Ecuador, specifically the Amazonian Quichua people, who call themselves *runa*. *Runa* in Quichua means person, however, is reserved for other Quichua people with whom they share ethnic and cultural relations.

As I delved deeper into Amazonian *runa* food practices, the role of the state in promoting food sovereignty and the definition of food sovereignty provided by the social movement, tensions between its various definitions emerged. Article 281 of the Constitution of Ecuador declares that, “Food sovereignty is a strategic objective and an obligation of the State in order to ensure that persons, communities, peoples and nations

achieve self-sufficiency with respect to healthy and culturally appropriate food on a permanent basis.” It goes on to list the aspects that the state is responsible for, from giving small and medium-scale farmers adequate access to land, taxes and tariffs to protect the domestic market, “fostering production” (Constitution of the Republic of Ecuador, 2008, Article 281, 1), to developing “scientific research, and technological innovation to achieve food sovereignty” (Constitution of the Republic of Ecuador, 2008, Article 281, 8).

While there are many overlaps, the definition of food sovereignty emerging from the movement’s organizations and declarations has some key differences. In 2007, a group of advocates met in Sélingué, Mali for a forum on food sovereignty, out of which emerged a succinct declaration of what food sovereignty is, what it promotes, and what it is fighting against. The Declaration of Nyéléni defines food sovereignty as “the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems. It puts the aspirations and needs of those who produce, distribute and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies rather than the demands of markets and corporations” (Forum for Food Sovereignty, 2007). While both definitions acknowledge the various scales of sovereignty, from the individual, to the family, to the community, and the nation, the Constitution of Ecuador defines the state as the moderator and responsible to the “thing” of food sovereignty, while the Declaration of Nyéléni believes that decision-making power should reside in the hands of the producers. Both reject the demands of the market to determine agricultural practices; however, the state views food sovereignty as an end-goal, while The Declaration of Nyéléni declares it as a right to decide what

practices are best. The state is utilizing the language of food sovereignty and has named itself its guarantor, without providing a solid definition of food sovereignty. Many of the state's declared responsibilities focus on food sovereignty at the level of the state, which can undermine local communities food practices, and continue to prioritize maximizing production as opposed to the food sovereignty movement's prioritization of food producer and consumer decision-making power. These overlaps and contradictions will be further examined in Chapter 1: Food Sovereignty as an Analytical Lens.

Despite naming itself responsible for food sovereignty, the state has insufficiently provided the structures necessary to promote the varied articulations of what food sovereignty could look like amongst different communities, cultures and ecosystems (Giunta, 2015; McKay et al., 2014). However, communities find ways to continue practicing culturally significant food and agriculture systems, in addition to fighting to maintain control over their ancestral territories. Amazonian runa food practices exemplify many of the tenets and ideals of the food sovereignty movement as they struggle to articulate their sovereignty and autonomy of their lands in the face of state-led development and extraction efforts. Understanding Amazonian runa food practices in the context of contemporary Ecuador articulates the tensions between the various interpretations of food sovereignty.

In this thesis I aim to explore food sovereignty away from a politics of state recognition, which “is predominantly attentive to the desire of the master (colonizer)” (Flowers, 2015, p. 37) and back towards the everyday actors whose practices have inspired the food sovereignty movement, and whose food systems and practices reflect the tenets and goals at the heart of the movement itself. In this way, I wish to follow in

line with James C. Scott's (1989) call to recognize the radical potentials of everyday actors. Failure to recognize the contributions of these everyday actors in advancing the ideals laid forth by the food sovereignty movement risks co-optation by larger forces who can discursively align themselves with and redefine food sovereignty. This in turn, could render the discourses that the movement has made prominent useless to incite the transformative change demanded by the food sovereignty movement.

As social movements are able to successfully reform politics, the application and implications of these reforms must also be analyzed in order to be able to make more meaningful and revolutionary reforms in the future. For this reason, the case of Ecuador's constitutional changes, and the outcome of these changes, serve as both an example and a cautionary tale. However, we must also acknowledge that many actors may not be organized within social movements. Many of the tenets presented by the food sovereignty movement are inspired by Indigenous agricultural practices. While Indigenous food producers may or may not be formally aligned with the movement, it is often times their everyday actions that contribute to their collective food sovereignty.

My thesis examines how food sovereignty is pursued on the ground by runa of the Ecuadorian Amazonia. However, I should make clear that this is not necessarily how they would articulate their practices themselves. While there is a lot of activity from organizations pushing for self-determination and sovereignty, many communities are simply resisting outside development and modernization by continuing their ancestral practices and refusing to give up their land. While it is true that state policies can have a profound effect on the lives of people, it is also important to acknowledge that food sovereignty is not an end-goal, but rather a process that must constantly be readdressed

and reevaluated due to changing needs (McKay et al, 2014). Although often faced with economic and geographic stressors that “graduate” (Biolsi, 2005, p. 245) or limit sovereignty and self-determination, the runa of the Ecuadorian Amazon find ways to continue food practices of cultural importance. As such, continuing to engage in traditional and culturally important food practices is also a political act that refuses to cede land or adopt outside food practices inconsistent with runa ideologies.

Runa food practices bleed out to other aspects of social and cultural life, and are inextricably linked to these aspects. Through the use of story-telling and singing during the labor involved in the planting, harvesting and preparation, and the consumption of food, lessons on how to live a moral life are transmitted. Indigenous space is being reconstructed in new environments, particularly urban or close-to-urban environments, through continued agricultural practice. This, in turn, helps create Indigenous space despite forced or willing migration closer to urban areas. Runa agricultural systems are bound to the ecology of the northeast Amazon, and extremely well adapted to the immense biodiversity and delicate topsoil of the region (Whitten 1976; Nuckolls, 2010). Women are the main cultivators of many staple crops, serving a key role in providing not merely nutritional, but also cultural sustenance to their families and communities. Paying closer attention to the interconnected roles that food production and consumption play in the Quichua community helps show the ways in which issues surrounding food for Quichua people are not simply food issues, but also are issues of indigeneity and self-determination. Impacts on food practices reverberate in profound ways in the community. I will explore these overlaps between food value, culture, food sovereignty and *sumak kawsay*, in order to show how restrictions on food sovereignty in Ecuador threaten the

plurinational desires of Ecuadorian peoples. Following in line with studies on political ecology, which “expose the forces at work in ecological struggle and document livelihood alternatives in the face of change,” (Robbins, 2012, p. 21) I explore how the Quichua people’s relationships with food are also deeply related to their cosmological relationships to the land and environment, which has affected how they care for it. Amazonian runa food practices are a conglomerate of their cosmological worldview through the terrain of extractive industry, social movement organization, globalization, modernization and urbanization.

The history of extraction and displacement in Amazonia threatens the biodiversity and fertility of the region, in addition to the runa ways of life attached to it. Modernization and urbanization have also had profound effects on the Quichua people, although many still find ways to practice agriculture and continue telling oral histories in urban and changing environments. Luisa Cadena, the strongwoman in Janice Nuckoll’s (2010) *Lessons from a Quechua Strongwoman: Ideophony, Dialogue, and Perspective*, goes through various means to secure land for cultivation after circumstances required her to move from her home deep in the Amazon to the urban area of Puyo on the province of Pastaza. Despite change, runa people maintain their identity, albeit in new and transforming ways. In the words of a Quichua elder Maximiliano Shiguango, "As much as I modernize, I'm the same person. Why would I change?"(quoted in Jarrett, Salazar & Shiguango., 2013, p. 128).

## **Structure of Thesis**

In chapter one, I begin with a history and context for food sovereignty as a global social movement as a response to the exportation of the agro-industrial model, which privileges production through technological advancement. The food sovereignty movement is starkly opposed to neoliberal policies such as structural adjustment programs and free trade agreements, whose negative effects have eroded domestic agricultural markets and practices on local farmers. Food sovereignty is not only a response to these negative effects, but also presents an alternative that is neither permanent nor totalizing. In this chapter, I also present a literature review of current scholarly debate on food sovereignty. Through this lens of food sovereignty, I will explore runa food practices in order to better understand the changing discourse, potentials and limitations of food sovereignty itself. Since Ecuador has declared the right to food sovereignty as a strategic goal and a right of its citizens, I analyze the contemporary politics of food sovereignty in Ecuador.

In chapter two, I give a brief history of the Ecuadorian Amazon, highlighting three major events to affect the area. I begin by first exploring the early attempts to colonize the area through the discovery of rubber, and the subsequent rubber boom. The following major impact was the discovery of petroleum. All three of these events caused major and significant changes in short periods of time that affected the identities and land-uses of the inhabitants.

In order to better understand the importance of food practices for the runa of the Ecuadorian Amazon, I trace the practices surrounding two specific foodcrops: manioc and guayusa. In chapter three, I begin by exploring the deep and complex world of the tuber manioc (*Manihot esculenta*), a tuber also known as *yuca*, *tapioca* or *cassava*. The



planting and harvesting of manioc, followed by the preparation of *asua*, a fermented manioc beverage, called *chicha* in Spanish, and even the creation of the bowls in which *asua* are drunk all have incredible cultural significance and value. Manioc production is almost exclusively the work of women, and thus pushes us to better understand the gendered analysis of rural women farmers provided by the food sovereignty movement. Additionally, I argue, manioc production falls in line with agro-ecological practices, an important tenet of the food sovereignty movement because of its ecological implications that are beyond sustainability.

In chapter four, I examine the role of guayusa, whose leaves are used to make tea consumed in the early morning. The time spent drinking guayusa is a time for families to interpret dreams and tell stories that are integral in the transmission of Indigenous knowledge through generations. The time spent drinking guayusa is an important family time when stories are shared that teaches children the norms of society. Guayusa presents an interesting case, as it has only recently entered the world economy. With its rapidly growing demand, there is the potential for its meaning to change and be renegotiated within runa society. The US-based beverage company, Runa LLC is the leading company importing guayusa to the United States. It is certified fair trade and organic, and although the food sovereignty movement emphasizes the need for transparent, fair and equitable trade, with a rapidly increasing demand, the future of guayusa production and trade remains uncertain. How will runa and other Indigenous Amazonian guayusa producers engage with this burgeoning economy? Will guayusa's meaning within runa society change to becoming nothing more than a cash crop? What will be the environmental

effects? In this chapter, I raise further questions for inquiry as the demand for guayusa increases.

The framework of food sovereignty I provide in chapter one will also serve as an analytical framework for the case studies of manioc and guayusa. As textual evidence about manioc and guayusa, I draw from published Quichua stories, published scholarly ethnographies of the area, popular Amazonian Quichua music, and to a lesser extent, my own experiences in the area studying Quichua at the Andes and Amazon Field Station near Tena, the capital of the Napo Province, and where I heard the elders speak in the opening pages. I will employ a political ecology approach to food sovereignty that takes into account the history of the region, contemporary politics, social movements, and Indigenous identity and relations to the natural environment. All of these factors contribute to the interwoven fabric that shapes runa relationships to food and agriculture.

Quichua issues on food are not simply food issues, but Indigenous and ecological issues as well. Through the stories presented in published volumes, songs and ethnographies, I argue that the Quichua relationship to agricultural production revolves around an ideology and practice of reciprocity that challenges neoliberal and market approaches that have resulted in a loss of ecological and agricultural biodiversity, and increased economic insecurity due to market volatility and the dispossession of land. Threats and challenges to food sovereignty come from much more than agriculture and food policies; they come from development and extraction policies and practice as well. Particularly in the Amazon, the discovery of rubber in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the petroleum industry in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century have had a huge influence on Indigenous Amazonian peoples and the environments they are a part of.

Given that I am looking at a small group of people, this research is not intended to be a prescriptive lens as to how food sovereignty should play out, or limit the ways in which Indigenous peoples engage with modernity and globalization. Rather, it seeks to challenge normalizing policies that limit food sovereignty's transformative power, and re-center discourse on communities who both practice areas of its ideals, and are at risk for a loss of sovereignty, self-autonomy, and social structures should their right to food sovereignty not be defended. While acknowledging the need for state support to secure the stage for articulating food sovereignty, state appropriations and their dictating of what food sovereignty is does not provide the framework for promoting its various localized interpretations. Rather, I supply possible policy outcomes based in situated food practices. Nor is this study intended to limit or prescribe the ways that Quichua people continue their food customs and values. Rather, this is to imply the deeply embedded and important role that food plays in culture and identity, and explore how limiting food sovereignty is equal to limiting sovereignty and self-determination in general. Food is not simply food, but rather is related to being in the world, and an engagement in the non-human environment, along with providing alternative epistemologies that teach youth how to engage in their surroundings.

## Chapter 1

### Food Sovereignty as an Analytical Lens

#### Why food?

We all know that food is necessary for survival. We also know that many people in this world go hungry, yet there is no single, fix-all solution to alleviate hunger and malnutrition. Larger questions of feeding the world run alongside the struggles of communities to feed themselves. Food is not simply a question of calories; what we eat can have huge health and environmental implications as well. The politics of food is an increasingly relevant and commonly debated topic. Fads on what is the healthiest, most ethical way to eat have come and gone as research debunks old assumptions and faulty science, bringing in new claims. Waves of food movements come and go, causing popular and mainstream shifts in consumer and producer behavior in regards to food.

Many popular food writers are now household names, and authors such as Michael Pollen, Wendell Berry and Vandana Shiva have come to grace the shelves of families in the United States. Additionally, food activism is often thought of in terms of moral consumerism. As growing trends would put it, eating organic, local or fair trade food is going to save not only our bodies and our waistlines, but also the world. But is the answer really so simple?

Julie Guthman does not think so. A sociologist at the University of California Santa Cruz, Guthman has taken on many of the contradictions in some of the reason food movements. In *Agrarian Dreams? The paradox of Organic Farming in California*, Guthman (2005) makes the case that the label “organic,” having once held importance in agricultural practices, has since become largely a commodity, a label to be used to

increase the price of food. Then, in her article, “Bringing Good Food to Others,” Guthman (2008) challenges the paternal and racially embedded positions of “I know what’s best for you” of many alternative food movements. Guthman (2011) even challenges the very idea that losing weight and stopping the “obesity epidemic” is the best approach to tackling health issues in her book *Weighing In: Obesity, Food Justice, and the Limits of Capitalism*, where she draws on preliminary research suggesting that food is not the only thing causing people to gain weight; chemicals in pesticides and food packaging may also play an important role, and a generational one in which we have yet to understand the results. Additionally, she argues that the very notion that people should have to pay more for healthy, non-toxic food contributes to socio-economic inequality and highlights the “limits of capitalism” to address food-related health issues. Branden Born and Mark Purcell (2006) also argue against an inherent belief that local food systems are more sustainable and socially just, what they call the “local trap.” Without clear definitions of what “local” is, they argue that “no matter what its scale, the outcomes produced by a food system are contextual” (p. 195-6).

Given the plethora of new food movements, how is food sovereignty any different? Does it provide the proper tools to address long-term food equity? The food sovereignty movement is by no means immune from contradictions and competing definitions, it differs greatly from the previously mentioned food movements because it is not about a single process, outcome or goal, and it is not driven by consumer or market demand. Rather, food sovereignty is at its core, like any other struggle for sovereignty, about a rearticulation of power and freedom, and the ability to choose, not simply the food you eat, but the entire system.

## **History of the Food Sovereignty Movement**

Scholars, activists and communities alike are making the case that while food is necessary for survival, it is also much deeper than that (Forum for Food Sovereignty, 2007; Angeulovski, 2014; Pearce and Louis, 2008). The food sovereignty movement emphasizes the deep cultural ties embedded in food practices. The ideas and concepts driving the push for food sovereignty emerged in the 1990s as a response to neoliberal forces affecting peasant livelihoods, particularly in the global south and Latin America (Martínez-Torres & Rosset, 2010). Peasants and Indigenous farmers have long fought for land, resources, water, recognition, fair wages, and rights throughout history (Clapp, 2016; Martínez-Torres & Rossett, 2010; Redclift, 1978; Rogers, 2010), and the food sovereignty movement is just one articulation of how those practices should be defended. Food sovereignty is the belief that communities and peoples should hold decision-making power in determining their agricultural production, distribution, and consumption processes.

In the late 1980s, a growing number of rural social movements in Latin America began to realize the systems of oppression and “the impact of similar global policies on local and national conditions,” such as cheap food policies that prioritized urban workers access to food over adequate payment to producers, and neoliberal structural adjustment programs that reduced funding and credit opportunities for rural producers (Martínez-Torres & Rosset, 2010, p. 151). As these movements began to realize the similarities in their situations, they began to network. These organizations felt that many NGOs too often spoke for peasants and farmers, and thus organized and developed their own

organization, autonomous and free of ties from NGOs, governments and aid agencies (Martínez-Torres & Rosset, 2010, p. 158). In 1992, at the “Second Congress of the Unión Nacional de Agricultores Y Ganaderos (National Union of Farmers and Cattle Ranchers, or UNAG) the idea La Vía Campesina, was hatched” (Martínez-Torres & Rosset, 2010, p. 156, drawing from the work of Marc Edelman, 2005). La Vía Campesina, translated literally, means “the peasant way”.

As such, La Vía Campesina emerged from Latin America, and has since become the largest international organization fighting for the right to food sovereignty, and advocating for the rights of communities to have the adequate resources and political power to determine their own food practices, from production to distribution to consumption (Forum for Food Sovereignty, 2007; Clapp, 2016). Despite its origins in Latin America, it has since evolved into a global movement. Food sovereignty takes into account that food practices have a high cultural value, and these cultural practices should be respected. Within these situated practices are a deep layer of ecological and agricultural knowledge, knowledge that has been historically delegitimized. The most recent example of which has been through the Green and Gene Revolutions that promote technological advancements and “improved seeds” through biogenetics and genetically modified organisms. These “improved seeds” require a high amount of inputs to be able to grow, and these inputs must be purchased (usually) through the same corporations that also provide the seeds (Clapp, 2016). This is often referred to as the agri-food industry, and the industrialization of food. Through tailoring “seeds into a nonreproducing commodity,” the industry has actually socially constructed “scarcity by creating a need for these products” (Yapa, 1993, p. 270). Food sovereignty, on the other hand, has the

potential to both critique and challenge the agri-food industry, by fighting for the resources to support autonomy over food production, such as the right to land, and water, and control over seeds (Giunta, 2014; & Massicotte, 2014).

La Vía Campesina, and other food sovereignty movements and declarations such as the Declaration of Nyéléni in 2007, are in stark opposition to neoliberal processes and institutions, such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (Forum for Food Sovereignty, 2007; Desmarais & Hernández Navarro, 2009; Martínez-Torres & Rosset, 2010). They strongly oppose food dumping, both outright and disguised as food aid, as it can disrupt local markets, introduce GMOs and create systems of dependency (Forum for Food Sovereignty, 2007). Food sovereignty differs to concepts of food security, which has as its goal alleviating hunger through the mass production of food with little consideration as to where that food comes from (Clapp, 2016; Massicotte, 2014). Food security as an organizing discourse was put forth alongside other neoliberal adjustments where “heavily indebted developing countries had little choice but to open up their agricultural trade policies” (Clapp, 2016, p. 14). This focus on production is based in Malthusian ideas of scarcity, which posits that human populations will “grow out of proportion to the capacity of the environmental system to support them” (Robbins, 2012, p. 14) However, this idea of scarcity and growth is apolitical in nature, as it misses the massive amounts of inequality in resource consumption, and assumes demographic growth to be a determinate of “environmental crisis and change,” of which it is actually weakly correlated (Robbins, 2017, p. 16). However, in order to promote food security, the Green Revolution in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century encouraged the industrialization of agriculture, the commoditization of food, and held as its goal increasing the production



of food. As a result, cheap food imports, predominantly subsidized wheat, corn and soy, began flooding the markets of economically disadvantaged countries, leading to volatility of food prices, putting the livelihoods of small and medium scale farmers at risk. While rich industrialized countries continued to subsidize their agricultural markets, developing countries were pressured to liberalize theirs, and lower tariffs on imported food products (Clapp, 2016). Additionally, the focus of the Green Revolution on creating high yield seeds also served to undercut pushes for land and agrarian reform (Clapp, 2016).

Food sovereignty, compared to food security, approaches the entire food system, and not only critiques the current industrialization and commoditization of food, but also provides real alternatives through a participatory democratic process. There are various positions that drive individual community goals and approaches, which range from cultural, to ecological and environmental, to economic and to the political. Many are responding to the negative effects of modernized industrial agricultural trends, which have reduced seed biodiversity, damaged ecosystems with pesticides, exhausted soil fertility, as well as uprooted localized agricultural and ecological knowledge.

The food sovereignty movement also recognizes the deeply cultural aspects of food. Isabelle Angeulovski (2014) discusses the role of community gardens in the lives of refugees living far away from their home environments. Her book opens with a vignette of community gardens, and their role with the refugee community in creating a sense of home away from home. Its significance shows us how the various refugees were able to heal and construct community around recreating foods from their homelands. “Because many gardeners have chosen to grow vegetables from their own country, they have also reconnected with their home cultures and traditional practices and shared them with other

refugees and participants. Rather than feeling like outsiders and foreigners in a new country, they are learning how to live, survive, and thrive in a new city through the medium of food by growing food and by teaching others about food.” (Angeulovski, 2014, p. 2). Food is positioned deeply in cultural traditions, histories and practices, and because of this it is also very personal, and connected to memory, place and personal relationships.

Indigenous geography also explores this relationship between Indigenous peoples and land-based practices, and rethinking the ways in which maps are created to accurately represent how Indigenous peoples use their lands (Bryan, 2009; Pearce and Louis, 2008; Tobias, 2000). These land-based practices contain a depth of knowledge that food practices are highly dependent upon. While there is a plethora of uses of Indigenous mapping projects, from preserving knowledge, to making land claims, to understanding effects of development projects (Tobias, 2000, p. xii), these maps push us to explore the complex relationship to land and territory that many Indigenous communities have, and of which food practices are a part of.

### **Gender in the Food Sovereignty Movement**

As the food sovereignty movement and its organizations grew, it further developed its critique on neoliberalism’s effects on the bodies of small and medium-scale farmers, particularly the lives of women food producers. La Vía Campesina believes that gender equality and Indigenous rights are integral parts of food sovereignty (Desmarais & Hernández Navarro, 2009; Via Campesina Internacional, 2012; Forum for Food Sovereignty, 2007). According to La Vía Campesina’s declaration of the Third Women’s

Assembly, “violence of the corporate-led neoliberal model of agriculture cannot be separated from violence against women, and thus, food sovereignty also means ending violence against women” from “forces outside of peasant communities, like the military or paramilitaries, and... violence within those communities as well” (Desmarais & Hernández Navarro, 2009, p. 25). The movement is fighting for “recognition and respect of women’s roles and rights in food production, and representation of women in all decision making bodies” (Forum for Food Sovereignty, 2007). La Vía Campesina furthered this “representation of women in all decision making bodies” to equal representation in their conferences, congresses and delegations (Desmarais & Hernández Navarro, 2009). From its inception in 1993 until its Third International Congress in 2000, women representatives increased from about 20% to 43% (Desmarais & Hernández Navarro, 2009, p. 24).

The representation of women in the food sovereignty movement’s organizations and congresses is only one small step in addressing gender inequality and violence against women, and requires a deeper understanding and recognition of the knowledge that rural women agriculturalists have and transmit (Massicotte, 2014, p. 262). Feminist political ecology provides a theoretical basis to understanding the ways in which advances in agricultural science can silence gendered knowledges and practices. Therefore, Massicotte (2014) argues, feminist political ecology “does not simply call for a valorization of any kinds of localized knowledges and practices, but for a recognition of the very existence of gendered knowledges and practices emerging from within specific communities and ecosystems that mutually shape, adapt, and resist each other, as well as the encroachment of external pressures usually privileging men and exploiting women

and nature” (p. 262). Indigenous feminist scholarship further calls for an intersectional analysis that recognizes the ways that Indigenous women experience exploitation (Women’s Earth Alliance and Native Youth Sexual Health Network, n.d.).

Recognizing the ecological knowledges and practices inherent through a feminist political ecology of food sovereignty opens the door for exploring the dialectic of food sovereignty and development. Development has often been synonymous with growth, without regard to quality. The Green Revolution promoted the production of cheap foodstuffs, and that the goal is to produce more, rather than produce better (Clapp, 2016). Because of this, many nation-states do not support the idea of food sovereignty, as they believe it will harm their production rates. They function under the paradigm that if people are hungry, there is not enough food. Rather than consider inequality in distribution, this paradigm places blame on countries with high population growth, which tend to be countries in the global south (Robbins, 2012) As such, the idea of a developed agricultural system under this paradigm is one that utilizes the agro-industrial technologies that are supposed to increase production.

But, do they? This idea that small-scale farms are not as productive is an idea that also needs to be challenged, as small and medium scale farms are estimated to provide the majority of the world’s food despite the fact that land distribution tends to be highly unequal in favor of large-scale agricultural, and generally monoculture, plots (Clapp, 2016). Within this lies another contradiction, that while peasants provide much of the world’s food, they also experience higher levels of hunger and poverty (McMichael, 2008), which highlights the need to respect the world’s producers of food, a demand set forth by the food sovereignty movement.

In fact, the cultivation and creation of biodiversity is a form of development that helps mitigate loss from large-scale crop failure, provides nutritional variety to diets, and sustains other animal and plant life in agricultural zones (Galt, 2014; Perfecto et al, 2009; Zimmerer, 1996). The biodiversity present in many types of traditional agriculture actually help develop biodiversity present in food crops, and offers a new shift in thinking about what “development” is. Before continuing, I think it is important to note that the term “traditional agriculture” does not mean a necessarily static and unchanging practice; traditional agriculture is often innovative and open to new practices, however is rooted in cultural practices and epistemologies (Zimmerer, 1996). As Karl Zimmerer (1996) argues through his work in the Peruvian Andes, studying crop diversity is different from studying ecological diversity in that crop diversity is maintained and created through human action. He challenges the belief that evolution and bio-diversity of seeds are based solely on environmental adaptations. Rather, they are maintained through human practices, and often reflective of human consumptive preference. However, this is also not to suggest that traditional crops are not well suited for their environments. In fact, it is the imposition of foreign seeds that are not well adapted to their new environments is precisely why they require high levels of inputs, such as fertilizer, and insecticide and fungicides. As is the case in Costa Rica, farmers have become dependent on pesticides to avert risk, because the crops are both ill-suited for their environments, and because they lack the natural defense of biodiversity to mitigate the level of crop failure (Galt, 2014). This dependence on outside inputs, which require capital, weakens farmers’ sovereignty over food practices as they grow dependent on corporate chemical inputs, often ending up in a cycle of debt.

## **Literature Review**

As food sovereignty has gained momentum due to the deepening understanding of the limits of neoliberal food systems and the world food economy, it is also reaching prominence in scholarly debate. A growing number of scholars from various fields and expertise ranging from geography, environmental studies, political science, sociology, history and anthropology have all contributed to the growing discourse and research on food sovereignty (Bravo Velasquez, 2016; Clapp, 2016; Desmarais, 2009; Giunta, 2014; Henderson, 2016; Martínez-Torres & Rossett, 2014; Massicotte, 2014; McKay et al, 2014; McMichael, 2008, 2015; Menser, 2008; Patel, 2009). Many argue that the food sovereignty movement and organizing bodies such as La Vía Campesina are powerful non-state governing bodies that present alternatives to neoliberalism and the violence associated with it (Massicotte, 2014; Menser 2008; Martinez-Torres et al., 2010). Many others also explore the cultural importance of connections to food systems.

As an idea, food sovereignty emerged and developed from within grassroots social movements, the process of which several authors believe to have truly transformative potentials (Martinez-Torres & Rosset, 2010; Massicotte, 2014; McMichael, 2008, 2015). Martinez-Torres and Rosset (2010) trace the history of La Vía Campesina to argue that through its processes La Vía Campesina has actualized a form of participatory democracy, while Massicotte's (2014) ethnographic study of an agroecology school in Latin America exemplifies the food sovereignty movement's feminist approach to agricultural practices by empowering women and legitimizing the knowledge of rural women farmers. Additionally, she argues that La Vía Campesina and the global networks

it has created around the issue of food sovereignty have presented a case of global governance that challenges both the normalizing neoliberal forces, and state's power of governance. McMichael (2008) believes that the food sovereignty movement is an example of an organized anti-neoliberal movement. However, McMichael (2015) also acknowledges the challenges of its implementation, and the necessity of addressing the redistribution of land for its actualization.

While acknowledging the potentials of the food sovereignty movement, Thomas Paul Henderson (2016) raises questions regarding the food sovereignty movement in several different ways. Henderson examines demands made by two La Vía Campesina member organizations, one in Mexico, and one in Ecuador. He argues that these organizations use the discourse of food sovereignty to advocate for their needs within the neoliberal system, and not beyond it. Focusing solely on discourse without looking at on the ground applications blinds researchers from fully grappling with the ways that food sovereignty movements and demands are often employing methods within the current system, not as an alternative to it. As such, he raises the question of whether or not the food sovereignty movement is actually anti-hegemonic, or if is simply another method by which peasant and Indigenous farmers' organizations can advocate for resources and social welfare programs, such as better access to healthcare and education. Henderson's data leads him to argue that neither organization is actually advocating for transformative policy changes, but rather they are advocating for resources and social initiatives to improve peasant livelihood within the current system as is. On the one hand, he claims, this means that these organizations do actually believe that the system can benefit them without restructuring. However, he cautions that it should not be understood that the

leaders of these organizations do not have more transformative and revolutionary goals for the long run, however, there are immediate needs that need to be met for peasant farmers. Food sovereignty in such a way has actually proved to be an effective tool for gaining access to resources, despite the fact that it falls short of its transformative potentials.

In this way, it is important to understand that food sovereignty is a process, and not a finite outcome (Mckay et al., 2014). With the promotion of peasant livelihoods, traditional agriculture and agro-ecology, it is also self-aware enough to understand that due to changing circumstances, the ways in which food sovereignty can actually look will change throughout time and location. As much as there will not be a “food sovereignty” that looks exactly the same in any two locations due to the different climates and ecologies of the various regions, it must also be implemented in such a way so that there can be flexibility through time.

One major question that Raj Patel (2009) addresses is who is responsible for maintaining and moderating these various forms of food sovereignty? For here lies one of the larger contradictions facing the food sovereignty movement: it is generally the state that is being held responsible for the moderation of food sovereignty. Patel (2009) approaches the fundamental contradictions behind the very definition of the “right” to food sovereignty. What is a right, if not an idea that must be defended? In order for a right, any right, to be defended, it needs a defender and moderator. Here is where things get tricky. On the one hand, food sovereignty is about sovereignty for individual communities to determine for themselves how their food systems should work. However, it requires an external, force to defend this “right”, thereby already engaging between two



different degrees of sovereignty, that of the state and that of individual communities' food sovereignties.

### **Food Sovereignty in Ecuador**

Ecuador has been a main focus for studies of food sovereignty due to the fact that it has incorporated food sovereignty as a strategic goal for the country into its constitution. This has been regarded as a highly symbolic and landmark inclusion. However, both Giunta (2014) and McKay et al. (2014) have explored the contradictions and difficulties in actualizing food sovereignty into the country. Giunta (2014) notes the many difficulties in how food sovereignty is actually defined which therefore affect its implementation, while McKay et al. (2014) note the lack of policy to truly defend food sovereignty processes, in addition to the contradictory definitions of food sovereignty. While there have been several laws that have passed to promote food sovereignty, such as the redistribution of land, these laws have not been pursued to their fullest degree, and appear to many to be little more than lip service, and a way for the state to gain support for its humanitarian and anti-neoliberal stance, while still practicing in developmentalist and extractionist economy geared for capitalist consumption (Humphreys, 2015; Fitz-Henry, 2015). This brings into question the sincerity of the administration's claims to defend the right to food sovereignty, or, the co-optation of food sovereignty for political purposes.

Ecuador's constitution was rewritten under the new administration of President Rafael Correa in 2007-08, and included the many significant changes previously mentioned. Framed in the ideology of *sumak kawsay*, it is one of the few countries to

have the right to food sovereignty included in its constitution. While the actual origins of *sumak kawsay* are contested, it is argued to originate from an Andean Indigenous ideology (Zimmerer, 2012), which believes that the good life is not based in the accumulation of capitalist consumption, but rather alternative development that is harmonious with nature and the environment and egalitarian amongst human society (Escobar, 2015; Lalander, 2014; Radcliffe, 2012; Vanhulst & Beling, 2014). Within this larger framework, the constitution incorporated the rights of nature and the definition of Ecuador as a plurinational state that recognizes the rights and self-determination of its various Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups (Becker, 2012). It is important to note that while the changes in the constitution present symbolic landmarks, these changes were brought about by many grassroots and Indigenous social movements, not only within Ecuador, but throughout Latin America. Ecuador was not alone in incorporating food sovereignty into their constitution, but rather, was part of the “pink tide”, or, the “new socialism” sweeping across Latin America. Venezuela and Bolivia also include the right to food sovereignty in their constitutions (McKay et al, 2014).

However, complications and contradictions have surfaced in the process of institutionalizing these alternative ideologies. While *sumak kawsay* has roots in Andean and Quechua cosmologies and has been a backbone of Indigenous rights movements in Ecuador and Andean countries, in Ecuador it has since become a tool by the state to help validate its extraction and development endeavors (Fitz-Henry, 2015, p. 263; Vanhulst & Beling, 2014). Many extraction endeavors claim to promote *el buen vivir*. Take for example Figure 2, of a billboard outside of Tena, Napo, which states, “Petroleum drives *el Buen Vivir!*”



Figure 2: Billboard outside of Tena, Napo reads, “Petroleum drives el Buen Vivir!”  
Photo courtesy of José Almeida.

However, the idea that capital is what drives el buen vivir is inconsistent with its environmentally conscious origins. Additionally, these extractions and development projects may actually threaten communities’ concepts of food sovereignty, the rights of nature, plurinationality and Indigenous rights that it discursively claims to support. In this way, the state has dictated what *sumak kawsay* is, which has in effect, changed its meaning (Zimmerer, 2012). In the same vein, the state has placed limits on the radical potentials of food sovereignty by defining it in a way that does not allow for the

extremely varied articulations of food sovereignty necessitated by the states' plurinational and multicultural society. Rather than allowing the varying groups to determine what food sovereignty looks like for their own communities, the state of Ecuador has attempted to define food sovereignty in a way that limits its transformative power (McKay et al., 2014). Additionally, the articulation of food sovereignty within the constitution and the national plans for buen vivir maintain a strong focus on the consumption of food, which mirrors discourses on food security. Food sovereignty social movements, on the other hand, demand greater attention be paid to the production of food and challenges many of the neo-Malthusian assumptions and capitalistic solutions of food security (Bravo Velásquez, 2016).

Rewriting the constitution is only the first step in the state's goals of food sovereignty. After the rewriting of the constitution, several plans and laws were put into place to advance the concept of food sovereignty. Much of the language of these plans, especially the *Buen Vivir: Plan Nacional 2013-2017* (Secretaría Nacional de Planificación Y Desarrollo, 2013) include strong anti-neoliberal language that resembles that of the Declaration of Nyeleni (Forum for Food Sovereignty, 2007). There was also a Plan Tierras, which was put into place to redistribute land, and LORSA, a law made to guarantee citizens and producers the right to food sovereignty.

However, despite these symbolic and legislative changes, the actual state of Ecuador's food sovereignty leaves much to be desired. McKay et al. (2014) provide an in-depth analysis of the limits and inadequate efforts to enact food sovereignty and agrarian reform policy. Plan Tierras did little in terms of actually redistributing land, and LORSA failed to acknowledge the varying ways that food sovereignty could be understood,

simplifying the necessarily complicated and varying forms of food sovereignty. Additionally, it consolidated even more power to the state to define food sovereignty, instead of lending discursive power to the various stakeholders. As a result, it limited the ability of small and medium scale farmers, rural women and Indigenous peoples to identify how food sovereignty could function in their own circumstances. Along with the cases of Bolivia and Venezuela, Ecuador's experience enacting food sovereignty shows that alone, laws and constitutional changes are not enough to implement food sovereignty, and that deep structural changes are also necessary for its accomplishment (McKay et al, 2014).

Rural development in Ecuador is also lacking. While the Correa administration succeeded in alleviating poverty in urban areas, these benefits did not reach rural areas (Becker, 2012). Additionally, Correa's home province of coastal Manabí received most of the agricultural funds allocated from 2005-2009 (McKay et al., 2014, p. 1187) Oil extraction also competes with local subsistence farming in the Amazonian regions. While the *Buen Vivir: Plan Nacional 2013-2017* (Secretaría Nacional de Planificación Y Desarrollo, 2013) encourages the use of renewable sources of energy, oil extraction continues to be the backbone of the Ecuadorian economy. The Andes continues to house many large monoculture plots and large-scale agro-industrial farming. Many of these plots do not produce food for the nation, but instead focus on exports such as flowers. The ownership of these lands also continues to be highly unequal in favor of large-scale agriculture (Bravo Velásquez, 2016), highlighting the need for stronger policy in support of agrarian and land reform.

Despite these limits, it is important to acknowledge that many of these changes came about through the hard work of Indigenous and peasant social movements, who continue to play an influential role in shaping Ecuadorian society. There are currently five Ecuadorian organizations that are members of La Vía Campesina, three of which are either Indigenous organizations or hold a high level of Indigenous representation. The Indigenous *levantamiento*, or uprising, in 1990 helped gain one of the most important national Indigenous organizations, CONAIE, a place in Ecuadorian politics (Becker, 2011; McKay et al., 2015; Whitten & Whitten, 2008). Despite the current shortcomings in the constitution and current laws, peasant and Indigenous participation and criticisms have a large influence. While the state may be using anti-neoliberal discourse to help consolidate state power and control, CONAIE and other organizations maintain their criticisms in addition to their alternative models. Because of this, and due to the advancements already made in Ecuador, there is still potential for food sovereignty goals to be rearticulated and developed in ways that better support the agentic power of communities, however, with the understanding that the constitutional and legislative changes are not an end-goal in and of themselves.

Despite limitations and contradictions in the definition and implementation of food sovereignty, it has served as a useful tool for peasant organizations to advocate for resources and social services. The most pressing danger of the food sovereignty discourse is that as a discourse, it risks being co-opted by the very forces it wishes to challenge. This is not an uncommon occurrence in food justice initiatives, as terms such as “local” and “organic” have been commodified, and “food security” and “food aid” have resulted in food dumping which has destabilized local economies (Clapp, 2016). Despite its

possible co-optation, through its promotion of agro-ecology and alternative development models, food sovereignty has the potential to offset, and even reverse the damage on crop diversity and peasant livelihoods, which have been the result of neoliberalism on agriculture, on the environment, and on the bodies of those who work in it.

In this thesis, I use the ideals and tenets of the food sovereignty movement at a very localized scale in Ecuador. Specifically, I explore the practices surrounding two specific foodcrops: manioc and guayusa. While these crops are cultivated by a number of communities and nations, I look specifically at the role these plants play in Amazonian Quichua culture. I argue that the practices surrounding manioc and guayusa represent many of the tenets of food sovereignty presented by the social movement. Through practices that are deeply cultural, gendered, adapted to their environment and agro-ecological, these continuing practices are in line with the goals of the food sovereignty movement, and also highlight what is at stake should development and extraction projects threaten their production. Rather than solely looking at state interventions to defend and protect the right to food sovereignty, we must also look more at localized food practices to understand the state of food sovereignty in Ecuador. The following chapter will give some context on the history of the area and people I will be discussing.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Spatial, Cultural and Political History of the Ecuadorian Amazon**

The Amazon has been a source of awe, wonder, fear and opportunity for writers and explorers of the region. The region's environment, marked by its high level of biodiversity and abundance of resources, has long been under the scrutiny of those who wish to harness its resources. Since the time of colonization, this view of the Amazon, as a place of abundance for the taking, has not changed, although the actual resources extracted, to a certain extent, have. The search for the mystical town of El Dorado and Europeans' hunger for gold in the early colonial period (Safier, 2008).has manifested in the 20<sup>th</sup> century as the search for another kind of gold: black gold

In order to justify extraction, mining, and land appropriation in the Amazon, the Indigenous inhabitants have historically been represented in one of two ways: either, they are not acknowledged at all, in the pristine and vast wilderness of the Amazon or, they are considered wild savages, heathens, and cannibals so morally vile in the Christian eye that any crime committed against them is justified (Stanfield, 1998). Their knowledges and contributions to science have often been silenced (Safier, 2008). These mindsets, of course, have had extreme consequences for the Indigenous inhabitants of the region. However, an extremely diverse group of Indigenous peoples have lived, and continue to live in the Amazon, albeit under changing circumstances and fluid identities. And, despite the ocean of green the Amazon presents, this environment has been actively shaped by the Indigenous peoples living there.



The Ecuadorian Amazon represents a small portion of entire Amazonia, and is home to at least eleven distinct Indigenous nations, with various different kinship networks within those distinctions. These are the Secoya, Shuar, Achuar, Shiwiar, Zápara, Siona, Huaoroni (Wuaorani), A'ícofán, Andoa, Quijos, the Quichua of the Amazon (Cabeza Gallegos, Pasmiño orellana, Vaca Bastidas & Falconi Benítez, 2013). Two tribes related to the Huaoroni are living in what is generally called voluntary isolation, the Taromenane and Tagaeri, who reside deep in the eastern edges of Yasuní National Park.



Figure 3: Map of Indigenous nationalities of Ecuador (Southern Amazonia).  
Source: Atlas of Ecuador 2013 (Cabeza Gallegos, Pasmiño orellana, Vaca Bastidas & Falconi Benítez, 2013). .

I will be focusing primarily on Amazonian Quichua, who speak a dialect of Quechua, the language of the Incas. Although the Incan Empire only arrived to its

northernmost territories in Quito a mere forty years before the Spanish arrived, the Quichua language is the most prevalent Indigenous language in Ecuador (Whitten, 1976). However, there are various dialects, and the Quichua spoken in the Amazon varies significantly from that spoken in the Andes; also, there are several regional dialects and cultural differences amongst Amazonian Quichua peoples. Norman Whitten (1976) argues that based on linguistic traits, it seems insufficient to argue that Quichua was spread by the missionaries, and became dominant by the church, nor can it be fully understood by arguing that Quechua was a pidgin trade language. He believes that we should consider the possibility that there was an “Andean-lowland, pre-Incaic, early Quichua language family to have ranged from the semi-Andean warm-valley Quichua living north of Cuzco in the early fifteenth century,” (p. 21) and became a lingua franca due to Incaic expansion.

Contemporary ethnic and cultural identity amongst the Indigenous peoples of the Ecuadorian Amazon is not easily defined. Many people consider themselves *Quichua hablantes*, meaning Quichua speakers, while recognizing a distinct ethnic ancestry as well. For example, the Andean language, currently at risk of extinction, has been almost entirely replaced by Quichua (Duche Hidalgo, 2005). In the following chapters, I will focus on Quichua hablantes of two different dialects, the Canelos runa of the Pastaza Province, and the Napo runa of the Napo Province.

Anthropologists Norm and Dorothea Whitten (2008) explain our inability as outsiders to fully understand the complexity of cultural and ethnic identity, and drawing from Reeve (1993-4) state:

“The people from Amazonia know who they are. But they use many cultural representations and identity referents to communicate their sporadic oneness in diversity. When they use such words as Shuar, Achuar, Shiwiar, Záparo, Andoa, Waoroni and seem to shift their markers from one to another they are not signaling or suggesting any ‘crisis of identity’. Quite the opposite; these designations and representations are tied to spaces and places that constitute the living network of past events and times that swirl and spiral into a dynamic present. They help to construct a multicultural, and at times intercultural modernity radically different but perhaps inextricably tied to the modernities of global forces anchored and dislocated by the contemporary nation-state and transnational corporations.” (p. 15).

Ethnic and cultural identity is fluid and complex. This is key in thinking about the connections and relations between Amazonian runa and other Amazonian peoples. While rivalries do exist amidst this “living” multicultural network, contemporary Indigenous social movements are also helping to bridge past conflicts as they form networks to assert their demands as Indigenous peoples (Whitten & Whitten, 2008).

### **Times of Destruction**

Since the nineteenth century, two major economic booms have caused significant and rapid change to the Ecuadorian Amazon. First was the discovery of rubber and the subsequent rubber boom, which displaced the Indigenous inhabitants as they escaped from illegal enslavement and violence caused by the rubber barons (Stanfield, 1998). This is often regarded as a “time of destruction” (Whitten & Whitten, Year, 2008, p. 40) by Pastaza runa. The second was the discovery of petroleum.

#### *Rubber*

The rubber industry peaked in Ecuador and the Amazons between the years of 1850-1933. Michael Edward Stanfield (1998) discusses the exploitation that ensued due

to the demand for rubber, arguing that the rubber boom was an example of white exploitation of the Amazonia. Various species of rubber and latex trees grow wild in Amazonia, and the product is extracted as a sort of sap that bleeds from the trunk. As noted by early explorers of the region, rubber and latex had been used, and continue to be used, by Indigenous peoples of the Amazon for various purposes, including footwear. However, it was also an extremely volatile substance. It would become tacky and gummy in the heat, and hard and brittle in the cold.

Then, in 1839, Charles Goodyear developed a method to process rubber and latex, called vulcanization, which rendered the rubber stable. This process dramatically increased the demand for rubber, and there were multiple scandals and cases of the illegal enslavement of Indigenous peoples (Stanfield, 1998). With increased automobile production, the demand for rubber surged. The automobile, truck and tire industries accounted for approximately 60-75% of the rubber being produced (Stanfield, 1998). The United States also proved to have an insatiable hunger for the product, and in the years 1875-1900, imported approximately half of all rubber produced (Stanfield, 1998, p. 21). The debt-peonage system allowed for the abuses of the *caucheros* (rubber tappers, or rubber barons) on their workers, and when Indigenous people did not repay their debts, the *caucheros* often resorted to violence. While many groups resisted encroachment by the barons, other leaders and headmen supplied labor and land to the white incomers. Oftentimes the *caucheros* even claimed that the Indigenous peoples participated in cannibalism in order to justify enslaving them. The rubber boom affected not only Ecuador, but Brazil, Peru and Colombia as well, and also affected the national borders drawn today, as Peru and Colombia invested more money into rubber

exploration, funding expeditions to find wild rubber trees. As Ecuador did not invest in the Amazonian rubber exploits in the same way that Colombia and Peru did, Ecuadorian caucheros did not have the same resources to contest and defend borders. In addition to a lack of support to Ecuadorian missionaries, Peru was able to acquire more land in the orient.

The rubber boom is only recently achieving popular media attention. The Colombian movie, *Embrace of the Serpent (El Abrazo de la Serpiente)* (Gallego & Guerra, 2015), depicts the cruelty the Indigenous peoples faced against the rubber thirsty barons. In a painfully raw scene depicting a blind amputee hopelessly attempting to salvage a spilt bucket of freshly tapped rubber for fear of retribution by the barons, the atrocities of the boom leave a bitter taste in the mouth.

The effects of the rubber boom in terms of demographics can be understood in a couple of different ways. On the one hand, it encouraged migration to the Amazon by those seeking work. It was in 1875 that explorers searching for rubber began the first major intrusion on Huaorani territories (Gerlach, 2003). In Brazil, many former slaves who then needed jobs went into the Amazon to work for the rubber barons. On the other hand, many Indigenous peoples fled enslavement and violence wrought by the barons, and many fled deeper into the Amazon. This in turn affected relations with the inhabitants already living in those parts of the Amazon, changing territorial and agricultural practices. However, the industry as a major boom was short-lived; it peaked in 1890-1900 and fell by 1914. The plantation model was unsuccessful due to various factors, including leaf blight and resistance by Indigenous peoples. The plantation model was exported to Southeast Asia, where it was met with success (Coomes & Barham,

1994). While the rubber boom did bring changes to land use and demographics, as it caused many Indigenous peoples to migrate deeper into Amazonia, and caused tensions with Peru that would later accumulate into war, it did not successfully bring modern development to the area, such as the construction of roads and airports. However, the rubber boom does highlight a legacy of Western ideology in Amazonia, which views the land as a source of capital, with resources for the taking and little regard for the people living there. On the other hand, what did spark intensified development in the Ecuadorian Amazon was the discovery of petroleum and its extraction, which continues to be a contentious issue.

### *Petroleum*

In the later half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, another resource became the new gold of the Amazon. In as early as 1921, Standard Oil was granted a concession to search for oil in the Amazon. However, when little oil was found, the searching stopped. Then, it wasn't until 1967 that a Texaco Gulf consortium discovered oil in the Sucumbíos province. A pipeline was built privately, and remained so for 25 years before being taken over by the state. In 2001, oil comprised 46% of the country's revenue (Gerlach, 2003). However, dependency on any one product puts the economy at risk, a lesson which should have been learned in the 80s when the country went into recession due to a global drop oil in prices. Despite the continued revenue from oil, poverty rates rose in the 80s and 90s. "Government figures set Ecuador's rate of poverty at 47 percent of the population in 1975, 57 percent in 1987, 65 percent in 1992, and 67 percent in 1995" (Gerlach, 2003, p. 45).

Over the years there has been a move from privately held oil companies to government and state held operations. In 1989, President Rodrigo Borja took over Texaco-Gulf, and renamed it Petroecuador, which was an early nationalization process. This, along with the power to tax other oil companies, gave the government a big source of income. However, oil extraction profoundly changed the environment of the *oriente*, as the eastern part of the country is often referred to, building roads and cutting down trees. Locals were displaced by colonos from the coast and highlands. Oil extraction also changed the environment in dramatic ways. In 1987 the Trans-Ecuadorean pipeline broke, causing one of the worst oil spills to date in the country. An earthquake invoked a landslide that swept away 25 miles of the pipeline, which had devastating effects on the economy, and lasting environmental repercussions. “By 1989 the pipeline had ruptured at least twenty-seven times in two decades, spilling 16.8 million gallons of crude oil into a delicate web of water.” (Gerlach, 2003, p. 57). Negative health effects have been associated with the contamination of rivers, such as “spontaneous abortion, neurological disorders, birth defects, cancer, and other maladies.” (Gerlach, 2003, p. 58).

State dependency on oil extraction has placed the burden of financing social welfare programs on the lands of the Indigenous peoples inhabiting the oil-rich Amazon, without benefiting those living on the land. Particularly after the 1960s, changing agricultural practices and increased demand for tropical fruits also encouraged *colono*, or outsider, encroachment of Indigenous lands. In a country that guarantees its citizens the right to food sovereignty, contamination of water and soil due to oil extraction, and exhaustion of topsoil due to modern agricultural techniques threatens this constitutional

right, highlighting the tensions that arise between development and varying levels of sovereignty in a self-declared “plurinational” state.

In addition to these two economic booms, as the Amazon has been historically depicted as an area devoid of inhabitants and full of potential riches, migration to and development of the Amazon has long been encouraged by the Ecuadorian government. In 1964, due to land shortages in the highlands, the government encouraged migration to the eastern jungle, and the newly built roads helped to encourage the migrants (for agricultural reasons). Other major commodities coming from the Amazon were tropical fruits, particularly bananas. In the year 2000, Ecuador was the world’s top producer of bananas (Gerlach, 2003). The government offered land grants to those willing to cultivate the land, also to help create a barrier against Peru. However, despite the perception of fertility of the land, it is actually quite poor for most types of agriculture, especially forms of intensive agriculture (Perfecto et al., 2009; Nuckolls, 2010). The topsoil was quickly exhausted, leaving the land only useful for pasture. “Particularly after the 1960s, however, ancient agricultural and cultural practices changed dramatically as the number of outsiders entering the area multiplied, among them missionaries, colonists, lumberman and oil workers. Cattle, fruit trees, and numerous new products and practices were introduced, all of which diminished the amount of available land and altered the traditional ways of life” (Gerlach, 2003, p. 11).

While Indigenous resistance has occurred throughout these periods, the booms of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries helped incite the creation of a highly organized Indigenous movement. In 1980, CONFENIAE (Confederation of the Indigenous Peoples of the Ecuadorian Amazon) was founded, which later joined with another organization,



CONAIA, to create CONAIE, now one of the most powerful and influential Indigenous organizations in Ecuador (Becker, 2011; Whitten & Whitten, 2008). These organizations have wielded political and social power, and have helped to shape the current political arena in Ecuador. In January of 2000, CONAIE led the Indigenous *Levantamiento* (Uprising) and successfully ousted then-president Jamil Mahuad (Whitten & Whitten, 2008). An estimated 30,000 Indigenous peoples protested against the government. At the time, many Indigenous peoples were detained and kept from entering the capital. CONAIE spoke with military personnel and the president feared relations between CONAIE and the armed forces. This was an example of one of the Indigenous movements' most organized and successful, not to mention peaceful and bloodless, endeavors in recent history. It successfully achieved its goal of removing the president, and at the same time fomented CONAIE and Indigenous peoples in general, as important and powerful political players.

Still, the history of extraction and displacement threatens the biodiversity and fertility of the area, and the ways of life of the Quichua people attached to it. Additionally, modernization and urbanization have also had profound affects on the Quichua people, although many still find ways to practice agriculture and continue telling oral histories in urban and changing environments. Threats and challenges to food sovereignty come from much more than agriculture and food policy; they come from development, in addition to extraction policy and practice. Particularly in the Amazon, the 19<sup>th</sup> century rubber industry and the modern-day petroleum industry have had a huge impact on Indigenous Amazonian peoples and the environments they are a part of. At the same time, many Indigenous peoples seek employment from these same industries.

Additionally, many Indigenous Amazonians have chosen to relocate closer to the urban towns of Tena and Puyo in order to have access to healthcare services, for economic or educational opportunities, or to be closer to family.

Rural Amazonian *runa* depend on subsistence agriculture and hunting and gathering. Nuckolls (2010) writes “Runa traditional ways of life combine subsistence-based swidden horticulture, in which fields are burned and then cleared for planting, along with fishing and hunting. They also gather many kinds of wild fruits” (p. 5). Other crops range from tobacco, cotton, the fruit *naranjilla*, which as cash crops, can help to supplement a family’s income. Many women also sell pottery, and men often work in the various industries, such as petroleum and logging.

When President Rafael Correa was elected in 2007, he campaigned under the premise that the energy sector would move towards a sustainable model and reduce its dependence on fossil fuels. He made an innovative attempt with the Yasuní ITT, an initiative to prevent petroleum extraction in Yasuní National Park. Yasuní ITT asked other countries that had committed themselves to reducing the world’s output of greenhouse gas emissions to financially support Ecuador to leave the oil in the ground. As a country in need of economic resources, the plan asked the international community to contribute funds in the amount of the lost revenue for not extracting oil. However, after the international players failed to support the initiative, it was abandoned in 2013 and has been opened up for extraction (Humphreys, 2015, p. 10). Yasuní National Park is one of the most biodiverse regions in the world, and it is also home to two Indigenous groups living in “voluntary isolation” in Ecuador. As petroleum extraction expands in the park, it threatens both the region’s biodiversity and the autonomy and sovereignty that has been

thus-far respected by the country to these two isolated groups. While the term “voluntary isolation” is the leading term to define these peoples, it should be noted that they are not entirely isolated from all forms of contact, and have attained many western products, particularly machetes, through trading with neighboring Indigenous groups.

In addition to petroleum extraction, mining projects are increasingly coming under the scrutiny of Indigenous peoples in the Amazon. There have been many altercations between the Shuar (who are neighbors of the Pastaza runa, with whom they share many cultural aspects and intermarry) and police forces, after the government granted the Chinese company EcuaCobres SE (EXSA) concessions to 41,000 hectares of land and the eviction of approximately 16 families (van Hulst Miranda, 2016). Police and military are now conducting raids looking for the supposed active Shuar militants opposing the project. The prevalent concern is that the mining project will contaminate the rivers and alter the cloud forest that they depend on for agriculture. The President of the Shuar federation has been arrested for his opposition to the mining project. This case highlights the continued struggle of Indigenous peoples in Ecuador, and despite the right to sovereignty and self-determination, including the right to food sovereignty, progress, development and extraction are still prioritized before these rights. The Shuar are depicted as people opposed to progress for defending their territory against resource extraction. This case illuminates the continued racism against Indigenous peoples as they are labeled as backwards, opposed to progress, and violent. Despite claims to the land, and the use of the land for traditional food cultivation, the Shuar are blamed for not allowing their land to be exploited to help reduce poverty outside of their territory, with little concern for those who live in that territory. Additionally, there are complaints that

jobs are not even available for those in the area as most of the jobs go to Chinese companies. The Shuar were not consulted over the concession of the land, since the government claims possession and ownership of the subsoil. As conflicts such as these continue with the current administration, Indigenous peoples of the Ecuadorian Amazon continue their struggles through both organized social movements and their everyday practices of resistance.

In the following chapters, I explore runa relations to manioc and guayusa within this cultural and developmental context. I argue that the “strategic goal” of food sovereignty that the state of Ecuador has declared itself a guarantor of must also address the land, water, seed, and resources needed to systemically support food practices. Amazonian runa today use both adaptive and innovative methods to engage in and support culturally relative food practices, whether it be by marching to the Ecuadorian capital of Quito to demand native title to land, teaching their children to cultivate manioc and other crops, telling creation and origin stories, or by using popular culture, such as song and music videos, to promote cultural norms surrounding food. These practices are not isolated to the realm of food, but rather bleed out into and are influenced by other ecological relations. They shape and inform the ways that runa see themselves in their natural environments. By prioritizing the understanding of food culture as a spatial practice which actively defends territory through the land-based relationships, I wish to critique and question the mainstream, Western notion of progress through time, which underscores the cyclical nature of land access as threatened by the rubber boom, petroleum exploration and extraction, large-scale agriculture and development initiatives to modernize the Amazon.

### **Chapter 3**

#### **Manioc, Gender, and Agro-ecology**

In the Ecuadorian Amazon, runa women cultivate one of the main foodcrops for their families. The food sovereignty movement has provided a gendered analysis on the role of neoliberalism on the female body, and contributed to feminist discourse on the ways that power is experienced through the intersections of race, class and gender. Since its conception as an international organization devoted to fighting for food sovereignty, La Vía Campesina has worked to increase female representation within its organization, provide resources for understanding gendered violence, and supply material on ways to stop and prevent it. In addition, they also hope to expand the understanding of what gendered violence is and how it manifests, through silencing and dispossessing in systematic and structured ways. In particular, rural women are often central providers for their families and communities, however their work is often undermined or overlooked. As women are the key cultivators amongst Amazonian runa, this discourse provides a key understanding of what is at stake.

As I will explore in this chapter, manioc requires gendered relations in the planting, cultivation, harvesting and preparation. Manioc, as a particular staple food crop for Canelos and Napo Runa, is almost exclusively the work of women; it needs women. As such, I wish to contribute to the discourse on gender in the food sovereignty movement by exploring the role that manioc plays in the lives of Amazonian runa in Ecuador. Such an analysis is in order, as a failure to address the gendered aspects of manioc cultivation risks co-optation by the government's interpretation of food

sovereignty. At stake is not only gender equality, since their role as producers and key players in society is devalued or delegitimized, but also the local knowledge inherent in this female practice. When applied to the environment of the Amazon, these agricultural practices are environmental practices that follow many of the tenets of agro-ecology. Agro-ecology is an agricultural method that “mimics” (Perfecto et al., 2009) natural systems. It helps sustain biodiversity rather than cut off migration patterns necessary to prevent large-scale extinctions. If the structures that manioc production is dependent upon are threatened, so is the value of women’s work and the knowledge they carry. State led food sovereignty programs focus primarily on a statewide scale of food sovereignty, and has not put in place the necessary measures for to ensure food sovereignty at the level of the community (McKay et al., 2014). Communities often require an extremely varied set of resources and policies in order to have the freedom to determine the most appropriate food practices for their members and environments. The knowledge imbedded in the cultivation, preparation and consumption of manioc is a source of social power for Amazonian runa women.

In this chapter, I will continue the elaboration of feminist discourse within the food sovereignty movement initiated in Chapter 1, and the ways they can be applied to the Ecuadorian Amazon’s land disputes. In particular, I discuss the contemporary land-based struggles of Ecuadorian Amazonian Indigenous peoples. These struggles highlight the contradictions inherit in the state’s self-designated role as food sovereignty guarantor, while simultaneously promoting extraction on Indigenous lands. The production of manioc for Amazonian runa women highlights these tensions and contradictions, and represents the role of women in the continued defense of Indigenous land-based practices.

I follow with a description of manioc production and the centered role of women throughout this process. Specifically, I explore the ways that women plant, harvest, prepare and serve manioc and the fermented manioc brew, *asua*. In doing so, I argue that Amazonian runa women promote food sovereignty in their everyday lives through keeping and maintaining their lands despite encroachment, and refusing to adopt a modernist commercialized understanding of food. As declared in many publications from the food sovereignty movement, food sovereignty necessitates gender equality (Desmarais & Hernández Navarro, 2009; Forum for Food Sovereignty, 2007). Food sovereignty is not applied from a top-down approach as the state is attempting to do, but rather, fostered from the ground, in this case from the *runa warmi*, the Quichua term for women and wives, of the Ecuadorian Amazon.

### **Gender and Gendered Violence in the Food Sovereignty Movement**

As discussed in Chapter 1, food sovereignty and gender equality have a closely braided relationship. Gender equality is not a new struggle within the food sovereignty movement, nor is a gendered read within it. Within La Vía Campesina, gender equality has taken a central role, not simply as a goal in their localized struggles, but also in practice (Desmarais & Hernández Navarro, 2009; Forum for Food Sovereignty, 2007). Having equal representation amongst the representatives of La Vía Campesina's delegates at conferences has grown from a goal to nearly a reality. In 1993, when La Vía Campesina first emerged "women represented only about a fifth of the delegates" (Desmarais & Hernández Navarro, 2009, p. 24). During their conference in Maputo in 2008, women's representation had grown to 46%, and amongst its International

Coordinating Commission (ICC), an organizing body within La Vía Campesina, as of 2009, ten of the 19 members are women (Desmarais & Hernández Navarro, 2009). Many of these changes came about from a strong push from Bolivian delegate, Camila Choquetilla, of the Confederación Nacional de Mujeres Campesinas de Bolivia (National Confederation of Peasant Women of Bolivia). At her insistence, La Vía Campesina began to take on in a more serious fashion the internalization of equal gender representation, through drawing on connections between neoliberalism and its negative effects towards women. La Vía Campesina has published various articles and pamphlets focused on violence against women. They argue that the “corporate-led neoliberal model of agriculture cannot be separated from violence against women, and thus, food sovereignty also means ending violence against women” (Desmarais & Hernández Navarro, 2009, pp. 25). Given the vast number of cultures and peoples participating in the food sovereignty movement and within La Vía Campesina, violence against women must be something approached in a culturally open manner.

In 2008, La Vía Campesina launched a campaign called the Global Campaign to End Violence Against Women. They published educational material to elaborate on the connections between the neoliberal agriculture model and violence against women. In trying to conceptualize a broad understanding of what constitutes violence, the publication argues that the “sociological point of view, considers violence as a transgression of social norms” (Via Campesina Internationale, 2012, p. 7). They interpret agribusiness as the “manifestation of capitalism in the countryside” (Via Campesina Internaciale, 2012, p. 23) that has dispossessed peasants of their land, and in the case of women, has often pushed them into domestic and unrecognized labor. Lack of rural



access to health care combined with higher pesticide exposure, the criminalization of protest (which is directly applicable to Ecuador, as it is illegal to engage in protest that impedes “state development”), the gender pay gap, the criminalization of women who receive abortions, and the lack of representation of women are some examples of ways that capitalism and agribusiness manifest as violence against women.

While the publication provides a framework for understanding the connections between capitalism and neoliberal policy on the bodies of women, it is necessary to state that agribusiness is not the only means by which capitalism has come to the countryside. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the extraction economy has also contributed to land dispossession, environmental contamination and pollution, and deforestation. These have all affected Amazonian runa, along with plantations and estates in the area. In this sense, it is crucial to understand that threats to food sovereignty do not only come in the form of competing agricultural models, such as the industrialization of agriculture and neoliberal structural adjustment programs and trade models, but also can come through more social-welfare oriented economies that depend on extraction. The Declaration of Nyéléni (Forum for Food Sovereignty, 2007) pointedly notes that the food sovereignty movement is fighting against forms and models of development that displace people and contaminate the environment.

Women specifically experience violence associated with extraction. A publication by Women’s Earth Alliance and Native Youth Sexual Health Network (n.d.) titled *Violence on the Land, Violence on our Bodies* explores that ways that extraction on Native lands manifests on the bodies of Indigenous women. While the publication focuses specifically on the United States and Canada, where relations with Indigenous

communities and the politics of indigeneity are inherently distinct from prior Spanish colonies, I believe that the publication provides useful insight in understanding the effects of extraction on Indigenous lands throughout the Americas. For one thing, Women's Earth Alliance and Native Youth Sexual Health Network (n.d.) argue that with extraction comes an increase in a male-centric workforce, and has been associated with higher rates of sexual violence and sex work (p. 8). Additionally, extractive industries contribute to pollution and contamination of land and water, which many Indigenous peoples depend on for subsistence. Particularly in North America, concern over higher rates of cancer, birth defects and miscarriages, and mental illness amongst communities located near extractive industry, highlight the need for further research into this correlation. A growing number of Native women are speaking out, inciting social action aimed at targeting these issues.

In the Ecuadorian Amazon, development and industry are still relatively young. As elaborated in chapter 2, in recent history there have been two “times of destruction,” instigated by the rubber and petroleum booms (Whitten & Whitten, 2008). In addition to these two large-scale extractive periods, increased migration eastward, metal mining, the tropical fruit trade, and cattle grazing have all placed land-based stressors on Amazonia. Indigenous social movements have been concerned with the contamination of land and water, deforestation, and land dispossession. Manioc production is one such way that runa women perform this resistance.

### **Manioc in Amazonia**

Manioc is arguably one of the most important crops for the Amazonian Quichua. From land use to planting, harvesting, preparation and consumption, the practices surrounding manioc possess powerful cultural traditions and performances, and material consequences. For Amazonian Quichua peoples and many other South American Indigenous peoples, the ability to propagate and cultivate manioc is indelibly integral to their food sovereignty. This section offers an exploration of manioc in Amazonian Quichua food practices, highlighting the cultivation of manioc, preparation of the fermented manioc beverage called *asua* in Quichua, or *chicha* in Spanish, as well as the with the production of the ceramic bowls for the specific purpose of drinking *asua*; I argue that these two important elements are irrevocably integral to food sovereignty in the region.

Manioc, also known as *yuca* or *cassava*, is a starchy tuber. For the Canelos and Napo Quichua peoples, the production of manioc is expressly the work of the women. Women care for the manioc plants as they might their own children, singing to them, and nurturing them in such a way that would seem unnecessary to the cultivation of the plant from a Western perspective (Swanson, 2009). Many ethnographers of the region argue that the Amazonian Quichua people challenge the nature-culture binaries through their actions and understandings of the world around them (Nuckolls, 2010; Swanson, 2009; Uzendoski, 2005; Whitten, 1976; Whitten & Whitten, 2008). As manioc production persists as a highly gendered practice, I will further analyze the practices surrounding manioc through the lens of food sovereignty. I argue that manioc cultivation practices are in line with agro-ecology, to support biodiversity in the region. Additionally, I posit that manioc practices exemplify the gendered analysis that is integral to La Vía Campesina's

interpretation of food sovereignty. Because manioc, asua, and the ceramic bowls (called *mucahua*, or *mucahuaguna* in the plural), are all almost exclusively female practices, a gendered lens is necessary in unpacking the specific cultural meanings to the practice. As manioc is a critical staple in Amazonian Quichua nutrition, the centrality of women's role in feeding their families must be acknowledged in speaking or writing about practices surrounding manioc. The localized knowledge behind manioc, asua and mucahua production is passed down through networks of communication dominated by women. However, economic pressures, environmental contamination, and land conflicts that limit the ability of women to produce manioc are in direct opposition to the supposed state-led goal of food sovereignty. Therefore, by continuing to produce manioc through agroecological methods, women are actively constructing their own food sovereignty goals.

In order to defend this position, I will begin with a brief history of manioc in South America, followed by a description of the methods of manioc cultivation, which fall in line with the merits of agroecology. I follow cultivation methods with a brief description of the production of asua and mucahuas. Central to the cultivation and production is the woman as transmitter of knowledge and familial provider. As such, the previous discussion of the gendered analysis provided by La Vía Campesina assists to fully understand the dimensions that rural, and particularly Indigenous women producers, engage in.

### **Manioc production**

Before delving specifically into Amazonian Quichua manioc practices, it is important to note that manioc is a staple food source for many people throughout South America and Africa. Manioc is native to South America, and was consumed by many Indigenous peoples pre-contact with Europeans. Despite the often-racist biases against Indigenous foods by the settlers and the importation of wheat and other Old World foods for fear of becoming Indigenous through consuming their foodstuffs (Earle, 2014), manioc quickly became a crucial food source for the colonists, particularly amongst Portuguese settlers in modern-day Brazil. During the colonial period, Portuguese settlers became dependent on manioc flour, called *farinha*, and as it grew to become a staple for the settlers, it highly influenced trade relations between settlers and Indigenous peoples (Leestma, 2015). Eventually, it would find its way to Africa and become an important crop on that continent as well.

While manioc is cooked and eaten in various forms, such as boiled, fried, or turned into flour, I will primarily focus on asua, a fermented beverage drunk by Amazonian runa, and the role of women in its production. For rural Amazonian Quichua peoples, asua continues to be an integral food item, consumed virtually daily. The bowls from which it is drunk are intricately painted using a brush made with the hair of the woman potter. Master potters are highly revered in a similar fashion that male *yachajquna* (literally knowers; shamans) are (Whitten & Whitten, 2008). With the increase in tourism, women are selling pottery in order to support their families, which plays a vital role in the economic wellbeing of their relations and communities. Similarly in the Andes, Quechua and Quichua women make asua, often spelled *aqha* in Sierran dialects. However, runa from the Andes use corn instead of manioc. During the colonial

period, the making and selling of asua was an important source of income in growing urban areas such as Potosí, and chicherías (places where asua was sold and consumed, basically a bar) were important places of social gathering (Mangan, 2005).

In addition to gendered relations, the cultivation of manioc is an example of agro-ecology. Within food sovereignty, there is a push for sustainable development and agricultural methods that mimic natural systems (Perfecto et al., 2009). The cultivation of manioc follows many of these principles. However, it is also important to note that while these may seem like two separate themes within the theoretical framework of food sovereignty, agro-ecology and gender are related in many ways. Feminist political ecologist Marie-Josée Massicotte (2014) argues that, “Agroecology also emphasizes the central role that many women and small producers play as knowledgeable actors, contributing to sustain life and diversified ecosystems” (p. 271). When it comes to manioc, Quichua women in the Ecuadorian Amazon play more than a central role; they are *the* main actors in manioc and asua production.

## **Cultivation**

While runa women are the cultivators of manioc, men help to clear the space for the woman’s *chagra*, a small garden or agricultural plot. In order to plant manioc, a couple will pick an area of forest to clear. The men and women generally clear a space together, using machetes (Whitten & Whitten, 2008). While the men clear trees, they usually leave certain trees that can be used for food, in addition to rubber trees. Guayusa trees are also left for tea, along with the bushes that can be used for dye, such as *manduru* and *huituc*, which are used to paint the bodies and faces for ceremonies.

Manioc does not require seeds, but rather is planted from cuttings of the main stock. After harvesting the tubers, the stocks are cut into roughly foot-long cuttings for propagating. The planting of the stocks is almost exclusively the responsibility of women. As the women plant the cuttings, they often spread bean seeds in the area as well for nitrogen. These beans are not edible, however, they serve a vital function in the cultivation of manioc by provided the necessary nutrients into the delicate rainforest soil (Whitten, 1976). Throughout this process, the women may sing and dance for their chagras (Lepe Lira, 2005). These songs establish a kinship relationship with their chagra, reinforcing a relationship built upon reciprocity. Each song is unique to the individual singer, and while many are passed down generations, they open to individual interpretation (Lepe Lira, 2005). Depending on the distance the chagra is from their homes, oftentimes a small house, *huasi*, is built to spend a few days there maintaining the garden. Frequently, chagras are a several day walk into the forest, and these types of gardens are called *purina chagra*, meaning ‘walking garden.’ Given the distances of these chagras, they are generally only visited every five months (Whitten, 1976).

The types of manioc planted near Puyo in the Pastaza Province are either of the white or red variety; they are sweet and tasty for the first few months, then become bitter and toxic, but after a few more months the toxicity lowers, and the manioc may be harvested and eaten. It is the women’s responsibility to make sure the manioc is no longer toxic (Whitten, 1976). These are known as the bitter variety of manioc. Sweet varieties do not have a toxic period.

The manioc is planted in rotation with plantains. While most crops planted in the chagras are done so by women, plantains and maize are an exception, and are the

responsibility of men. This rotating chagra “rolls” through the forest, with the tail, plantain end, returning to jungle. This is understood as slash-mulch agriculture, however there can also be selective burning to fix nitrogen, known as slash and burn agriculture (Nuckolls, 2010).

The runa farming systems make use of several sustainable practices which benefits both the people and the ecological system in which they plant. In their analysis of biodiversity loss as it relates to localized extinctions and migrations, Perfecto et al. (2009) argue that in the increasingly fragmented environments of tropical and sub-tropical regions, what they call the “matrix,” the type of agriculture practiced is incredibly important. The matrix is this fragmented landscape of “natural” areas with agricultural plots, dwelling spaces, and extraction zones. Rather than thinking of agricultural practices as a blanket practice, as detrimental to the landscape and biodiversity, agriculture can actually promote and conserve biodiversity. While manioc production does require the clearing of forest, cultivation occurs through the “rolling” slash and mulch or slash and burn horticulture practices in small plots that move about the forest. This helps to preserve the integrity of the soil compared to more exhaustive agricultural systems that are larger-scale and longer term.

### **Asua & Mucahua**

As previously noted, manioc production is a vital part of Quichua cultural traditions, specifically for women; as it is passed down through networks of communication dominated by women. Various ethnographers of the Canelos and Napo runa acknowledge the link between asua and female sexuality. In an ideal marriage, the



men bring home wild game to give their wives, while the women serve their husbands asua (Swanson, 2009; Uzendoski, 2005). In order to make the asua, women peel and cut the manioc, boil it, mash it, masticate a small amount and return it to the mash, and then ferment the mash. Through mastication, the enzyme ptyalin present in saliva is added to the mash, which “converts the starch into destrine and maltose” (Whitten & Whitten, 1988, p. 19). The mash is mixed with water and served in a mucahua, a painted ceramic bowl. Mucahua imagery is extremely powerful in that it is involved in interpretations of dreams, stories, and life experiences (Whitten & Whitten, 1988; Whitten & Whitten, 2008). All of the materials for the ceramics must be gathered, which include different colors of clay, for the shape, and to make different slips to paint with. The mucahua is then fired, and as it is cooling, a tree resin, called *shinquillu* is applied to create a seal. This resin in particular cannot be used for hot beverages, as it is heat sensitive and will wear away.

The collection of these materials requires not only the knowledge of the clays and tree resins themselves, but also a spatial understanding of where these materials can be acquired. Each material represents a different place in the forest, from the riverbed where the clay can be found, the tree where the resin is gathered, to the body of the woman herself, as she paints with the fine brush of her own hair, and the images that have come to her as she interprets them on clay. Without this site-specific knowledge and wisdom (Basso, 1996), acquired through interactions with other women and experiences of walking through the forest, she cannot be a skilled and master potter. The more beautiful the design, the thinner the walls of the mucahua, the more “knowledgeable” the potter (Whitten & Whitten, 2008).

Archeological evidence suggests that pottery in the Amazonian Quichua region began around 1,500 years earlier than anywhere else on the hemisphere, about 7,500 years ago, and that “the pottery tradition spread-presumably in association with manioc-throughout Amazonia to the base of the Andes” (Whitten & Whitten, 2008, pp. 168). Drawing on the work of archeologist Anna C. Roosevelt (1995), Whitten & Whitten (2008) highlight the connection between ceramics and manioc, arguing that the ceramic traditions actually expanded through the preliminary use of manioc. Today, in addition to household and festival use, women, and even some men, utilize ceramic skills to engage in the market economy

While much has been said about the symbolic relationship of female sexuality and the asua she serves, through courting or marriage (Uzendowski, 2005), I aim to turn away from this discussion on making asua and mucahuaguna to explore its symbolic role in Quichua cultural production. Virtually all ethnographers of Amazonian Quichua people acknowledge the central and important role of manioc, and particularly asua, in social relations and food practice (Nuckolls, 2010; Swanson, 2009; Uzendowski, 2005; Whitten, 1976; Whitten & Whitten, 1988). I want to instead highlight and strengthen the central role that women have to play in this staple of nutritional and cultural life. Women hold the specific ecological knowledge, and practice it in their everyday lives. It is important to note that, with an increasing dependency on the market, and interactions with urban environments, many of the ritual aspects related to manioc cultivation, and the making of asua and mucahuaguna, such as the singing to the garden, and ritual fasting involved in the cultivation process, are becoming less common. This is not to suggest that there is a changing spiritual relationship between the woman gardener and her plants, but that

rather, the time commitments needed to perform these rituals may be difficult with other time pressures (Swanson, 2009). Despite these changes, the centrality of women in the cultivation of manioc remains the same.

Manioc is a source of power, autonomy and knowledge for runa women, through which they establish a prominent and integral role in society. The gendered analysis provided by the food sovereignty movement argues for the need for women's roles such as these to be acknowledged and valued, and that a failure to do so leads to gender inequality and gendered violence. Women, through the production of manioc, asua and mucahua, play a key role. If women are to be respected and valued, their work must also be respected and valued, not merely as "women's work," but as a key part to the functioning and survival of society as a whole not only for survival, but also for cultural production.

### **Manioc as gendered resistance**

As a gendered practice, manioc, asua and mucahua production are defended on the ground by the Quichua women who refuse to relinquish their lands to competing claims. Their knowledge of cultivation methods, such as the nitrogen-fixing beans, and the proper preparation methods to reduce the toxicity of the bitter variety, the women embody their knowledge of the plant in order to feed their families and sustain culturally relevant food practices.

In the face of petroleum extraction and copper and gold mining, Indigenous peoples of the Ecuadorian Amazon are working together to establish sovereignty over their territories. Despite past rivalries, in 1992, on the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the arrival of

Columbus, representatives of the Canelos Quichua, Achuar and Shiwiar communities marched to Quito to demand permanent rights to their territorial lands, including the subsoil, and the recognition of Ecuador as a multicultural and multinational nation-state (Whitten & Whitten, 2008). In certain respects, some of their demands have been met. However, while 65% of their territorial claims were granted, it divided the land into irrelevant geometric blocks (Nuckolls, 2010). Fifteen years after the march, the constitution has been rewritten to include the recognition of Ecuador as a plurinational country, organized under the principles of *sumak kawsay*, which includes the notion that nature has rights, and that food sovereignty is a strategic goal. However, what the constitution fails to address is the different epistemologies and ideologies inherent in the constitution's understanding of *sumak kawsay*, and the ecological relationship that an Indigenous interpretation of *sumak kawsay* depends on. Therefore, while the government granted a percentage of the lands demanded by the march in 1992, and rewrote the constitution under a framing of *sumak kawsay* in 2007, such changes have proven to only partially fulfill the demand of Indigenous social movements. Janice Nuckolls (2010) sums up the conflict as such:

“The government's inadequate response to indigenous demands is a symptom of a greater problem underlying the debates over land use. Simmering below the surface of these debates are conceptions of natural resources that cannot possibly be reconciled. The Ecuadorian government has a rational, marketplace view of its natural resources as commodities for the generation of capital. Runa see their land quite differently. Their traditional subsistence-based swidden horticulture practices are extremely well adapted for the rain forest ecosystem and cannot be easily altered without doing long-term, possibly permanent, damage to their surroundings.” (p. 8).

The struggle for food sovereignty is experienced through the ongoing practices in relation to manioc production, through the agro-ecological methods of the Amazonian Quichua

women. In their defense of land and resources, they are also defending their embodied and localized knowledge that is integral to their survival as Quichua women. Unless the government is able to shift its paradigm away from interpreting the land as a “generation of capital,” shallow claims to defending the right to food sovereignty are easily unmasked. Rather, it is the everyday practices of Amazonian Quichua women through their production of manioc, asua, and mucahuas that defends Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination.

In this way, food sovereignty as a process cannot be relegated simply to the state’s commitment, or lack thereof, for protecting and promoting it as a right. Food sovereignty, understood as a process rather than an end goal (McKay et al., 2014) leaves open the possibilities of communities to determine for themselves the how their food practices should look.

I propose that food sovereignty can also be understood in terms of small acts, which promote and establish communities’ autonomy. Exploring and understanding the practices revolving around specific plants and the people who cultivate them deepens our understanding of what these acts may look like, and provides tools for tackling the complicated questions of how to institutionalize the right to food sovereignty. Rather than making blanket policy and constitutional changes that attempt to define what food sovereignty as a “thing” is, and subsequently consolidate power to the definer, a closer analysis can reveal particular needs of individual communities. These particular needs can help shape better, more specified policy.

In the case of manioc production for Amazonian runa communities, lessons for specific policies could include making sure that women have equal access to land, or that

women have access to markets to sell pottery, particularly to markets for tourists. This could mean establishing and supporting co-ops near urban areas for women who relocate and reside in or near urban centers. This could mean ensuring women have a network or a seed bank in case harvests and future cuttings are lost to flooding or landslides. This could mean ensuring that women hold representation in decision-making bodies, particularly in regards to land-use and extraction in their territories. This could mean ensuring that women receive just payment for their contributions to their communities and families.

As stated in the introduction of this thesis, I am not attempting to dictate to communities how they should proceed in their food practices or societal organization, nor do I claim to be an expert on policy development. Rather, I hope to expand the discussion on how food sovereignty can be better institutionalized to defend communities' ability to decide for themselves their food practices. In the case of manioc production by Amazonian runa women, in which the practices also highly align with many of the goals of the food sovereignty movement, women help to promote food sovereignty in their everyday lives.

## Chapter 4

### **Guayusa Time: Building strength and the transmission of knowledge**

I'm standing in front of the energy drinks in the local Albuquerque Co-op on the southeast side of town. It's about nine o'clock in the morning and I've managed to miss the morning rush of people grabbing food, most likely hot, ready-to-go breakfast burritos that are the staple of this city, on their way to work. There is nothing less than a rainbow in front of me. Cold brew coffee, maté, chai tea, iced green tea, aloe juice, and pure cane-sugar sodas only begin to describe the vast array of these "natural" drinks. They range from about a dollar in cost, to almost five. In between the bright, red bottle of a thai iced tea, and small green and white cans of something called a Sencha Shot stand three white cans with the word RUNA reading in various colors from bottom to top: orange for blood orange, green for lime, and purple for berry flavored. They are all USDA Certified Organic, and read "clean energy drink from the guayusa leaf" under their RUNA trademarked brand name. So what is this product, which has trademarked the name Quechua people use to call themselves, and what does this guayusa leaf do? How did it get here, and what are these implications for the growers in its home country? And, how does it apply to food sovereignty? These are some of the questions I will explore in this chapter.

In the previous chapter, I explored the ways in which understanding manioc production can better inform food sovereignty policy, along with acknowledging the role of runa women in promoting many of the tenets and goals of the food sovereignty movement. In this chapter, I focus on the tree, guayusa (*Ilex guayusa* Loes.), whose

leaves are used as an infusion much in the same way that tea is brewed. Being high in caffeine, it is consumed primarily for its stimulating effects, however, it has been shown to have various medicinal properties as well. While various Indigenous peoples in northeastern Amazonia produce and consume guayusa, I will continue to focus primarily on Amazonian runa practices, and to a lesser extent their Shuar and Achuar neighbors. For runa, the time spent drinking guayusa tea early in the morning is a time for elders and parents to transmit knowledge to the youth through story-telling and dream interpretation. These stories provide both ecological and agricultural knowledge, while at the same time informing youth of cultural norms and how to live as runa. During this daily morning practice, other activities, such as putting capsicum pepper in the children's eyes as a strengthening ritual, and bathing in the river, are performed. These activities are intended to not only strengthen the youth, but also to instill Quichua values.

The runa discovery story of guayusa, which I will share later, is a story that on one side, highlights aspects of Amazonian Quichua ecological knowledge that question and challenge Western notions of a separation of humans from nature, which has created a binary between the two. On the other hand, this story holds cultural significance that is intrinsically entwined with the plant itself by shaping norms of strength, dignity and well-being in line with runa ideals. Stories such as these inform land-based practices through their shaping of an epistemology that recognizes the spirits of the forest. As Indigenous, particularly Andean, cosmologies are becoming more visible in the political realm, they are beginning to challenge the separation of science and politics that came about through modernity (de la Cadena, 2010). As the non-human world became increasingly understood through the realm of science, it separated humans from the environment. At



the same time, humans became relegated to the world of politics, which simultaneously excluded anything other than human (de la Cadena, 2010). In order for a cosmology that recognizes the spirits of the forest and mountains to enter the political realm, it must challenge the separation of humans from their ecosystems that has silenced the non-human. As such, story-telling has political consequences. The runa recognize the time drinking guayusa in the morning and telling stories to be a fundamental part of their lives and culture. The food sovereignty movement recognizes the importance of traditional and ancestral knowledge, as it provides alternatives to the dominant land-use paradigm. Therefore, guayusa consumption is an important site of transmission that contains within it ecological relationships.

The importance of guayusa is also expressed through an unlikely venue: a native beauty pageant. Held in Tena, Napo, the annual *Ñusta Wayusa Warmi*, or Princess Guayusa, is a bilingual event that blends traditional ethnic cultural identity with the urban environment (Wroblewski, 2014). The contestants have to perform cultural practices surrounding guayusa in addition to speak publicly in Quichua, which the majority of urban runa youth cannot. However, the event remains controversial, particularly for using the contentious standardized *Kichwa*<sup>2</sup> promoted through the state's bilingual programs. The standardized Kichwa is more similar to Sierran dialects, and looked down upon by Quichua elders as it is not how they speak (Wroblewski, 2014). On the one hand, the competition highlights the tensions between urban and rural runa. The majority of residents from Tena believed the event helped “rescue” the Quichua language and legitimate Quichua culture within popular culture (Wroblewski, 2014, p. 75). The fact

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<sup>2</sup> I use the spelling Kichwa here to refer to the standardized spelling, known as Unificado.

that I wish to stress is not whether or not the beauty pageant is going to help save the Quichua language, but rather that it serves as a site for agricultural knowledge transmission through dancing. It also highlights the importance of guayusa in runa life by the mere selection of guayusa in the title and theme.

In addition to the localized practices of consuming guayusa tea, the history of the plant provides depth to our understandings of colonialism, neoliberalism and resistance in the area. Until recently, guayusa escaped notice and commoditization. I will explore how both the history of the plant, and Quichua relations and practices surrounding guayusa, are representational of the responses to neoliberalism and the legacy of colonialism that the food sovereignty movement seeks to address. Because guayusa has only recently entered the world economy, its future, and the future of those who grow and consume it, is anything less than certain. In this chapter I argue that an exploration of the history of guayusa production and consumption offer a deeper understanding of colonial and market forces on the Amazon, but more particularly, the ways in which its Indigenous inhabitants have approached, through resistance and cooperation, these forces. As a plant that cannot naturally propagate and requires human cultivation through the planting of cuttings, guayusa is an example of the way humans manage, create and promote agricultural biodiversity (Perfecto et al. 2009; Zimmerer, 1996) Not all agriculture interacts with its environment in the same way; some promotes and creates biodiversity, while others homogenize seed varieties and landscapes. The agro-ecology promoted in part through the food sovereignty movement understands the importance of quality agricultural landscapes. Humans in the Amazon have helped create approximately 600 varieties of guayusa (Dueñas, Jarrett, Cummins, & Logan-Hines, 2016). Similar to manioc, runa

practices surrounding guayusa exemplify many of the goals and tenets that the food sovereignty movement declares to promote and defend. However, through its unprecedented expansion into the global economy, its role in Amazonian society may also be experiencing a rapid shift. In this chapter, I hope to expand the conversation on policy interventions in regards to guayusa production.

### **History of use**

Guayusa has been used by Indigenous peoples in Amazonia for at least 1,500 years (Jarrett et al, 2016). *Ilex guayusa* is a holly plant native to the eastern Amazon, and can be found as far north as Colombia, ranging down through Ecuador to Peru and even Bolivia. This little-researched and scarcely-known plant is used in both ritual and daily settings. In the eastern regions of Ecuador, at the foothills of the Andes, I will focus mainly on Amazonian Quichua consumption, however will also touch on its use by the Shuar and Achuar, with whom the Quichua share many customs and kinship ties.

The lack of knowledge, research and commoditization of guayusa is a bit puzzling given its daily and customary use by Indigenous peoples in Amazonia, and the history of other caffeinated plants. However, there are a few who have researched its use by Indigenous Amazonians (Bennett, 1992; Dueñas et al. 2016; Jamieson, 2001; Jarrett, 2013; Lewis, Kennelly, Bass, Wedner, Elvin-Lewis & Fast, 1991) Guayusa is high in caffeine, along with other alkaloids such as theobromine (Dueñas et al., 2016; Kapp, Mendes, Roy, McQuate & Kraska, 2016), which is also found in chocolate. Guayusa therefore, has many stimulating effects. While cacao, coffee and tea flourished in European markets, and were a source of social stratification being drunk by both elites in

the colonies and elites in Europe, the consumption of guayusa remained regionally limited. As Londa Schiebinger (2005) argues, understanding ignorance and why certain information does not travel, helps us to better understand the politics and values at a given time. What was it about guayusa that rendered it immune from European commoditization? Due to a lack of research, there is no concrete answer at this time. However, it can be explained in part through Jesuit involvement, and also European stigmas towards what they deemed to be “Indian” food (Earle, 2012; Patiño, 1968).

In the 1700s, many Jesuit missionaries noted the consumption of guayusa by Indigenous inhabitants, principally as part of a mixture with hallucinogenic plants, which were considered evil (Patiño, 1968). However, many missionaries without their usual medical supplies quickly learned the benefits of guayusa tea to cure stomach pains, fevers, chills and venereal disease, as well as female sterility (Patiño, 1968, p. 311-312). Other sources note its use to prevent hemorrhaging after childbirth (Jarrett et al., 2013). Given its range of stimulating effects and known health benefits, it is thus curious why the popularity of the plant did not reach Europe, as many other caffeinated and health beneficial plants quickly did, such as cacao. Cacao, native to Mesoamerica, became extremely popular amongst the Spanish elite for its stimulating effects and health benefits.

Ross Jamieson (2001) explores the commoditization of various caffeinated plants in the New World and their role in society, including cacao, coffee, tea, and even guayusa. He elaborates on cacao as a form of currency in pre-Columbian Mesoamerica. After conquest, elite Spaniards started drinking the beverage, particularly elite Spanish women. However, it took nearly a century before cacao beverages became popular back

in the Old World. In Mesoamerica, the Spaniards left the cacao plantations intact.

However, “By the late sixteenth century this system was becoming over-burdened. The deaths of a huge segment of the local population from European diseases depleted the farming workforce, and Spanish insistence on the intensification of farming practices on the cacao plots caused catastrophic drops in productivity” (Jamieson, 2001, p. 273).

While cacao is native to the Americas, coffee and tea originate from the east. All three came to Europe where they entered the market and soon became normal practices in everyday life. While the history of all three plants are distinct in terms of their arrival and their histories pre-arrival to Europe, they have all proliferated in the global economy. Europe, it seems, has historically had an appetite for caffeine.

However, “[n]ot all the caffeine drinks encountered in the course of European colonial expansion came to be accepted for consumption in Europe. In the Americas there were several plants besides cacao that contained caffeine and were known to the indigenous inhabitants, none of which ever reached commercial distribution in Europe.” (Jamieson, 2001, p. 277). One of these plants is yerba maté, the south-Atlantic cousin of guayusa and another holly plant. However, maté, unlike cacao and coffee, was wild not domesticated. Maté became extremely popular with the Jesuit missionaries in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. “Jesuit policy encouraged large-scale plantation agriculture on the seventeenth century South American missions, as a method of using indigenous labor to produce marketable commodities, and make the missions both self-sufficient and profitable” (Jamieson, 2001, p. 277). It expanded as a commercial market in the colonies as opposed to the Old World. “The expulsion of the Jesuits from the Spanish colonies in 1767 ended the cultivation of *yerba maté* on the mission plantations.” (Jamieson, 2001, p. 277).

Guayusa, much like maté, became popular among the Jesuits (Jamison, 2001, p. 278; Patiño, 1968). “The Jesuits commercialized guayusa on a local scale, planting it in mission gardens and trading it in highland Andean markets such as Quito. Guayusa did not gain the general market that *yerba maté* received, and when the Jesuits were removed from South America in the 1760s guayusa became a product grown and used largely by Native people” (Jamieson, 2001, p, 279). Two other Amazonian plants, lianas, contain high levels of caffeine, yet were never commercialized. They are now used in bottled sodas in Brazil. Considering the popularity of other caffeinated plants and early trade by the Jesuits, the exact reasons why guayusa never became a globally traded commodity until recently are still somewhat of a mystery. Perhaps ritualistic use associated with hallucinogenic plants marked guayusa. Perhaps guayusa was considered “Indian food.”

However, despite the lack of market access, or maybe because of it, guayusa use has remained a staple part of Amazonian Quichua life. While research indicates that the physical range in which guayusa is grown has shrunk, there are currently an approximate 600 different varieties of guayusa (Dueñas et al, 2016). Now, for the first time, guayusa is reaching an international market; in 2009, Runa Tea LLC was founded by two young college graduates, and after receiving various funds from competitions in the United States and Ecuador, they went to the Ecuadorian Amazon to propose to locals the marketing of guayusa tea as a prepared beverage. While initially met with laughter by the locals, Runa is now supplied by a self-declared 2,300 family farmers, and in the year 2015 made \$6 million, and an estimated \$10 million in 2016 (Kaplan & Willis, 2016). It has attracted investment from celebrities such as Channing Tatum, Leonardo DiCaprio and Olivia Wilde (Varolli, 2016; & “Olivia Wilde”, n.d.). Soon after establishing Runa

Tea LLC, the co-founders started the non-profit Runa Foundation, which in addition to supporting the farmers, conducts medical research on the pharmaceutical potentials of the Amazonian rainforest in an effort to promote conservation of the area. The hope is that, if medicinal plants are found, there will be an additional “value” that could help prevent deforestation through logging, mining and petroleum extraction.

Given its recent and rapid success, the future of guayusa, and those who grow it remains uncertain. Will there be heightened pressure for farmers to produce more and more guayusa? What will be the environmental effects of this? Will there be strained relations if producers feel they are not getting their fair cut? The presence of guayusa in the media in the United States is quickly expanding (Goldfine, 2015; Kaplan & Willis, 2016; Latif, 2017; “Olivia Wilde”, n.d.; Patterson, 2016; Varolli, 2016). Bloomberg Businessweek (Kaplan & Willis, 2016) recently published one of the only news articles I encountered which had a more critical and nuanced reading of Runa Tea LLC. Drawing on the words of a producer they state, “‘The guayusa sales have helped the financial situation of my family,’ says Ruth Grefa, who tends 400 guayusa plants on a small farm in Napo province where she also grows bananas, pineapples, yucca, limes and cacao. Still, she noted that the 35¢ per pound Runa pays for guayusa leaves is lower than what other crops fetch” (Kaplan & Willis, 2016). Will guayusa begin to be cultivated in other areas, and if so, what effect will it have on the current producers? Currently, Runa Tea LLC is certified organic, fair trade, and non-GMO, however, as it grows in size, will these values change? Already Runa has a new CEO, who has a background in big name companies such as Red Bull. While she claims to be inspired by the story of Runa and to have a passion for clean energy sources, the guayusa plant could possibly be facing the

biggest change in production scale in its history. While far from definitive, some answers may lay within an analysis of guayusa within Quichua communities, and a reading through the lens of food sovereignty. In the next sections, I will explore the role of guayusa amongst Napo and Canelos runa, and how the trajectory of guayusa can be understood through the larger discourses emerging through food sovereignty. I will begin the following section with an origin, or discovery story, of guayusa from the Napo Province.

### **The Discovery of Guayusa**

“Guayusa has been used for a long time, but at first, guayusa was unknown to anyone. At that time, the forest was very aggressive with people, and they were always sleepy and couldn’t do anything. They were tired and weak all the time. This was the biggest problem facing the first people in the Amazon.

One day a man was hunting in the forest when a heavy rainstorm came. He took shelter under a nearby tree to wait until the rain stopped, and as the hours passed, he started to feel sleepy and eventually fell asleep under the tree. Suddenly, he heard a female voice calling to him, "Take me so you won't be sleepy." The man listened attentively to find out where the voice was coming from, but he didn't see anyone around. There was nothing but trees.

A few moments later, he realized it was the tree itself that was speaking to him, so he grabbed a leaf and chewed it. He ate the leaf and immediately felt relieved. He was no longer tired or sleepy and felt full of energy and strength. After experiencing the effects of the guayusa leaf, he harvested a few branches and took them to his family. He first shared the leaves with his family and then told all the neighbors about his experience and urged them to consume it so they would not feel lazy or tired but have lots of energy. From that moment on, people started to plant guayusa all over. They discovered that it was good for your health, for sleepiness, fatigue, laziness, body aches- a very powerful medicinal plant.”

Francisco Grefa Salazar cited in (Jarrett et al., 2013, p. 33-35)

Two main themes emerge from this story that bear significance to the topic of this chapter. The first is that it highlights key values amongst runa, and the second is that it depicts an epistemology that valorizes the knowledge within the non-human environment. Laziness is one of the worst attributes in Quichua society (Swanson, 2009); in fact,



elsewhere in the collection of stories in *Waysa Runa*, the three rules for runa are stated as: “don’t be lazy”, “don’t lie”, and “don’t steal” (Jarrett et al., 2013, p. 40). Laziness, understood in the runa sense, also refers to a “moral laziness” manifested as sexual promiscuity (Swanson, 2009). Of significance is that, unlike in contemporary Western cultures, sexual promiscuity is looked down upon in both men and women, and not simply as a means to control female sexual behavior.

The significance of the origin story of guayusa then, is not only the fact that it promotes runa values, but that guayusa itself is a solution to the societal problem of laziness. According to the story, the “biggest problem in the world” was their tiredness and weakness. If guayusa is the solution to this problem, what is at stake for the changing practices of guayusa cultivation? If guayusa becomes increasingly commoditized, does it threaten small-scale subsistence production of it? While this is by no means an argument to prevent market integration as it can provide income to families and communities, I pose this question within the context of the modern agriculture industry. Food sovereignty emerged, in part, due to the effects of a disconnect from food. Through globalization, mass production and free-trade policies, people have become distanced from food, both physically and mentally (Clapp, 2015). This distance has allowed for the lack of respect for the farmers of the world, who have been subjected to unfair land dispossession, wages, treatment, and the imposition of genetically modified organisms, pesticides, and fertilizers that require financial input rendering them into a system of debt. While the majority (if not all) of guayusa production is currently fair trade and non-GMO, what will happen as demand increases?

The second theme in relation to the story of the discovery of guayusa has to do with the representation of the plant itself. In the story, it is the guayusa tree itself that speaks to the sleeping man. The plant is represented as having its own spirit-force, through speaking to and helping the lazy man. Similarly, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2014) analyzes a Anishisnaabeg story on the discovery of maple syrup. Kwezens, a young girl, discovers maple syrup by watching a squirrel suck on a tree. Because she trusts herself, her community, and the squirrel, she is able to learn from the squirrel, and bring the knowledge back to her receptive kin. She presents this story as a story of Indigenous resurgence and decoloniality, where land is part of the learning and educational process. To be knowledgeable, then, is to be able to learn from the land.

The story of the discovery of guayusa is very similar in this respect. Even though the man has the negative trait of being lazy, he is able to listen to the land to discover guayusa. Also analogous to the story of Kwezens, upon returning to his family and community, he is treated with trust and respect, and essentially uplifts the people out of their lazy stupor. However, in order to be able to listen to the land, one must recognize that it is even listenable. The relationship that runa have with their environments is reflected in this story, where they can recognize its spirits and its agency. For that reason, Swanson (2009) also notes how part of the ritual singing to plants, is so that the plant will give them its medicine (2009). Eduardo Kohn (2007, 2013) another anthropologist working with Napo runa communities, notes the importance of recognition between humans and animals. For instance, in his book *How Forests Think* (2013) he argues that the runa custom of sleeping on their backs highlights runa recognition of the souls and beings of jaguars. The Napo runa Kohn worked with say to sleep on your back so that if a

jaguar comes at night, he or she can see your face and recognize you as a person, and therefore won't eat you. Kohn argues, that this recognition is two-way, and highlights runa relations with other beings of the forest. In terms of the act of singing to medicinal plants, this signifies that the plant in fact has the agency to not give away its medicinal properties. It is, as articulated by de la Cadena (2010), an "earth-being" and a political actor.

## **Discussion**

Guayusa, as a newly commoditized food item, has a number of paths it can follow. Until recently, it has resisted consumption and marketing by outside forces and has remained, largely, a food item cultivated and consumed by mainly Indigenous peoples. It holds within it traditional knowledge and serves as a site of knowledge transmission. This space helps in part to shape runa relations to their environment.

The discursive tools provided by the food sovereignty movement help to valorize and emphasize the cultural relevancy of not only the consumption of guayusa, but also the role that Indigenous peoples have played in contributing to its diverse number of species. Currently, it is being traded in accordance with the food sovereignty movement's call for just, and equitable pay, although guayusa is not the most profitable plant for farmers. Through the story of guayusa therefore, I argue that the "state" of food sovereignty in Ecuador cannot be solely measured by the strengths and weaknesses of laws, but rather in the everyday practices of people on the ground. Guayusa in particular, with its historical resistance to trade and commercialization, emerges as a site to strengthen the autonomy of Indigenous peoples there. Whether or not it continues on that path remains to be seen.

How then, can runa practices revolving around guayusa be protected, as it follows the path of commoditization? Thinking further on how specific policies could be put into place to defend not only runa practices, but also other guayusa users and producers in the Ecuadorian Amazon, a number of possibilities and starting places come to mind. For instance, protecting the right to cultivate guayusa within its current ecological zone may help current producers maintain control over prices and mitigate competition. However, at the same time, if demand increases beyond the capacity of its current production sites, it may be beneficial for guayusa to be cultivated in other areas, and prevent negative environmental effects. However, the question is not whether or not guayusa should be grown elsewhere, it is that current producers should be a part of this decision-making process. I have mentioned throughout this thesis that there is no one vision for food sovereignty, but rather a rearticulation of power in favor of small and medium scale producers. Perhaps, in this case, a fitting policy would ensure communities or Indigenous nations hold collective decision-making power as to the future production of the plant.

## **Conclusion**

The “future of food” is currently a hot topic encountered in books, documentaries, conferences and everyday conversation. This future will, undoubtedly, vary depending on one’s subject position, place and socioeconomic class. Food sovereignty, however, does not posit that these differences are necessarily bad; what it posits is that we have, as a collective, a situated choice as to what our food practices are. Currently, there remains massive inequality when it comes to access to food and agricultural resources. From my position here in an urban area of the United States, where those with economic means have virtually limitless options at high-end grocery stores, there still remains massive food insecurity for those of the lower class, along with extremely limited options for those living in food deserts. However, efforts to simply increase production do not address issues in access, or the ways in which agricultural systems interact with their environments. The current industrial agricultural model comes at the detriment of not only the livelihoods of small and medium-scale farmers, but also the environment on which food production depends on.

There have been many approaches for addressing food inequality and the negative environmental impacts of the current world food economy. Unlike the local and organic food movements, food sovereignty promotes a system that places at the forefront the right of producers, and negates the market as a viable regulating power. Additionally, it acknowledges the deeply cultural aspects of food practices. What happens to people’s food production is a deeper cut than just food.

Food sovereignty can and will take many forms that vary through time and place. Depending on how it is being used, food sovereignty discourse can strengthen family ties,

gender equality, and the transmission of knowledges. Many organizations use it to acquire much needed resources within the dominant neoliberal model. However, it can also be used by the state to consolidate power, and place the needs of the state over those of individual communities.

In this thesis, I have argued that food sovereignty depends on the work of local, rural producers. In this case, I have explored a group of Indigenous people who share kinship, language and cultural ties in the Ecuadorian Amazon. They are in one aspect, a part of their larger national identity as Ecuadorian. However, they also share a much smaller and closely related connection to their fellow runa. As the country continues on a tract of modernization, development and extraction, runa are often caught in the middle of expanding state control, and the struggle for Indigenous rights to land and self-determination. These struggles are expressly found within the cultivation of specific foodcrops, such as the ones I have explored in this thesis. The practices surrounding the cultivation, preparation, distribution and consumption of manioc and guayusa hold lessons for how to conceptualize a larger world food economy that respects Indigenous and farmers' rights, is ecologically sound, valorizes the work and contributions of women and the traditional knowledge they hold, as well as highlight the risks being imposed by globalization and pollution. While it is easy to look at larger statewide articulations of food sovereignty, and the actions of larger social movements, we must also recognize the work of local actors whose work exemplifies the tenets of the food sovereignty movement.

Additionally, I have argued that through closely examining practices surrounding specific foodcrops, we can better understand the specific needs of communities in their

struggle for food sovereignty. Rather than create policies that are totalizing and aimed at a universal idea of what food sovereignty is, smaller local policies and assurances better serve communities struggling to maintain their way of life amidst an increasingly globalized world. In the case of manioc, ensuring that women have equal access to land to cultivate manioc is key. Additionally, there must be enough land for the moving chagras. For guayusa, ensuring that communities hold decision-making power of the future of guayusa production, through something like communal intellectual property rights, can help protect not only the current market, but also the knowledge embedded in its production and consumption.

If we are to move towards a future of food that recognizes the rights of Indigenous and rural small and medium-scale producers of food, we must also recognize the ways that traditional and cultural knowledge is embedded within practices surrounding individual plants. This knowledge challenges dominant ecological paradigms that present the environment as land for the use of capital production. Instead it presents a case where we can understand the relationship humans have to their surrounding environment, and the ways in which we actively shape that environment as it simultaneously shapes and reshapes our very beings. Agriculture is no exception.

Before concluding, I would like to acknowledge the limitations of this study, and avenues for further research. Primarily, this work would be greatly enhanced by in-depth fieldwork that expressly focuses on how runa themselves would define food sovereignty and the situated policies they would like enacted. As I previously noted, the runa I have discussed in this thesis might not all articulate their food practices within the discourse of food sovereignty themselves, however, many are familiar with larger state politics

through their involvement in social movements and the propaganda put forth by the state. A reflective analysis that compares their own local articulations of food sovereignty as either assisted by or contrary to state actions would greatly enhance the critiques of the effectiveness of state-sponsored food sovereignty from the perspective of those living under it.

However, I also believe that this crop-specific analysis also has much to offer. The vast array of embedded knowledge and cultural meaning behind each crop unveils many social, ecological and epistemological nuances that complicate a simple understanding and application of food sovereignty. A further in-situ study about the practices of both manioc and guayusa, in additions to other important staple crops for the Amazonian runa, would also greatly enhance further research on how local food practices engage with the ideals of food sovereignty.

Despite these limitations and a need for further research, I believe my findings point to a deeper understanding of food sovereignty that privileges the work of not only social movements, but also the everyday actors who, wittingly or unwittingly, are advancing its cause. They have been not only the inspiration for much of the foundation of the ideals that the food sovereignty movement has outlined, but also have been some of its most successful actors. Despite facing extraction-oriented practices that attempt to claim territory and have the effects of contaminating land and water necessary for life, they continue to find ways to cultivate their own food, in their own ways.

Indigenous peoples in the Ecuadorian Amazon can use the discourse on food sovereignty to defend territory from encroachment by petroleum extraction, and the increasing presence of mining extraction. The question is whether the state definition of



food sovereignty will impair localized interpretations and struggles, by posing them as anti-statist. To go back to the case of Luisa Cadena, the focus of Janice Nuckoll's (2010) *Lessons From a Quechua Strongwoman* , the women of the Ecuadorian Amazon will not go down without a fight. Despite being faced with economic stressors, and a necessary move from rural Montalvo to the more urban area of Puyo, Luisa refused to abandon the food practices that gave meaning and joy to her life. Despite encroachment by cattle ranchers, she fought for the right to her familial lands. Rather than wait for policies, laws or constitutional changes to support her dedication to food practices, she simply found a way.

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